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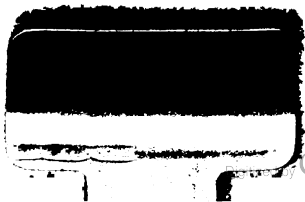
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# THE MAGPIE JACKET.

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*Also, Uniform with the above,*  
ON AND OFF THE TURF IN AUSTRALIA

THE  
MAGPIE JACKET

A TALE OF THE TURF

BY  
NAT GOULD  
("VERAX")

*Author of "The Double Event."*

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# THE MAGPIE JACKET

*A TALE OF THE TURF.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE OLD HALL.

ARDEN HALL was an old-fashioned place. Squire Arden, many people said, was as antiquated in his notions as the Hall that bore his name. He was opposed to many of the innovations in the customs of the people that had been made since the days when he was a boy.

Squire Arden believed in the old maxim, "Speak the truth and shame the devil." He was an upright, honourable man, and hated hypocrisy and deceit. He was a thorough-going Tory of the old school, and was an uncompromising advocate of the rights of property. He did not march with the times—in fact, the times had made forced marches upon him, and left him considerably in the rear. Never a rich man, Squire Arden had been accustomed to spend money somewhat

recklessly. He was generous to a fault, and never refused assistance where he thought it was required. He was an old bachelor, and remained true to his first and only love, who had been killed by a fall in the hunting-field. The death of the woman he loved was a sad blow to William Arden, and he never forgot it.

His sister, Harriet Arden, remained with him at the Hall until she married and became Mrs. Richard Fairfield.

Her husband, Richard Fairfield, was a lace manufacturer at Nottingham. Unfortunately he was a heavy speculator on the Stock Exchange. His heavy losses preyed upon his mind, and he gradually lost his health, and died ten years after he had married Harriet Arden.

Mrs. Fairfield was left with an only son, Eric Arden Fairfield, and an income of three hundred a year saved from the wreck of a once fine business.

Squire Arden had been opposed to his sister's marriage, but when Richard Fairfield died he insisted upon his widow bringing her boy to reside with him at the Hall. Harriet Fairfield gladly availed herself of the Squire's offer. She thought it would be a fine chance for her boy, as her brother had no heir to inherit the Arden property.

She did not know that the Squire was at times hard pressed for money; on the contrary, she imagined he had a substantial income, more than sufficient for all his wants.

So Harriet Fairfield brought Eric to the Hall when he was nearly ten years old, and had remained there ever since.

Eric was a great favourite with the Squire. His boyish pranks and scrapes amused his uncle.

"The Squire makes a regular fool of that lad. He spoils him," was the general verdict.

As is usual in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the general verdict was wrong.

Squire Arden did his best to spoil the lad, but Eric was not made that way.

The lad loved his uncle, more than he had ever loved his father, and next to his mother, the Squire held the warmest place in his heart.

Eric's first escapade when he was installed at the Hall, was to take the Squire's pet fox terriers out for a stroll, and accompanied by a well-known poacher, who possessed several well-trained ferrets, make a raid on a neighbour's rabbit warren.

"You foind the dogs, Mr. Eric, oi'll foind th' ferrits. That's a fair bargain," said the poacher.

Eric considered the offer, and said he thought it was fair, and the expedition was arranged accordingly.

Naturally the Squire's neighbour objected to this raid on his rabbits, and it took William Arden a considerable time to pacify him and obtain from him a promise to take no further steps in the matter.

Eric was called before his uncle and severely reprimanded. His uncle knew the lad always told him the truth and loved him the more for it.

"How dare you take my dogs out, sir?" commenced the Squire, "without my permission? And

with that poaching rascal, Stubbins. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir, associating with the blackguard. Why did you do this?"

"For love of the sport," answered the lad. "Why, it was fun, uncle," said the boy, his face flushed with the thoughts of the excitement he had gone through. "Bob has lovely ferrits. The rabbits bolted like winking. Taff (the squire's favourite terrier) caught them quick as lightning. He is a dog that, uncle, I never saw such a fellow. He beat Ruff badly. One rabbit got away, and Taff and Ruff were after it like a shot. Wasn't it fun? Ruff gained at first, but Taff came with a rush and caught the rabbit as it doubled. Taff's a lot better dog than Ruff."

"So he is, so he is," said the Squire, who had become quite enthusiastic over Taff's performance. Then suddenly checking himself, he said, with an attempt to look stern:

"But why did you go poaching on another man's property? Were my rabbits not good enough for you?"

"Yes, uncle," said Eric; but you see it was all Bob's fault."

"What had Stubbins to do with it?" asked the Squire.

"It was this way, uncle. I said it would be a jolly lark to catch some of your rabbits. Bob said, 'No it wouldn't. He had no objection to taking anyone else's rabbits; in fact, he rather liked it.' What do you think Bob said, uncle?"

"What did the rascal say?" asked the Squire.

"Bob said——" Eric hesitated. "Shall I tell, uncle?"

"Yes, tell me. Go on."

"Bob said 'he'd be d——d if he'd ever poach on Squire Arden's land again after what he did for his wife'—he said 'missus'—'when he was doing three months hard for poaching.'"

"Oh, he said that, did he," said the Squire, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, and he said more, uncle," said Eric. "Bob said 'if there were more men like Squire Arden ther'd be less rogues.'"

"He's a poaching rascal, for all that," said the Squire.

"I know he's a poacher," said Eric. "That is why I asked him to go with me. He knows twice as much as your gamekeepers, uncle."

Squire Arden laughed heartily as he said:

"I'll be bound he does. I've a good mind to turn Bob Stubbins into a keeper."

"That's capital, uncle. I'll go and tell him," said Eric.

"What!" shouted the Squire. "Where is he?"

"In the kitchen having some dinner, uncle," said Eric. "I told him to come and see how we'd get on."

This was too much for the Squire. He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Send him up here," he said to Eric.

A shuffling sound in the corridor and a knock at the Squire's door.

"Come in," said the Squire.



Eric entered leading a big burly man by the hand.

"Oh, it's you, Stubbins," said the Squire.

"Yes, sir," said the man.

"How dare you take Master Eric out poaching," thundered the Squire.

"That's not correct, uncle. I took him out poaching," said Eric.

"Be quiet, sir," said the Squire. "You'll get six months for that bit of business," said the Squire to Stubbins.

"Yes, sir," said the man.

"You're a vagabond. You're a confirmed poaching scoundrel," said the Squire, wrathfully.

"Yes, sir," said Stubbins."

"Don't stand there saying 'yes, sir,' like an idiot," said the Squire.

"No, sir," said Bob.

"Should you like to be a gamekeeper, Bob?" said Eric.

"Aye, Master Eric, I should that. But no one'll give me a chance. I can't get no sort o' work," said Stubbins.

"You can go now, Stubbins," said the Squire.

"Yes, sir," said Bob, and backed out of the room.

"You've forgotten, uncle," said Eric.

"Forgotten what, you young rascal?" said the Squire.

"You haven't turned Bob into a gamekeeper," said Eric.

This incident had taken place a dozen years ago, and Eric Fairfield was now two-and-twenty.

For twelve years Bob Stubbins had served the Squire of Arden Hall faithfully, and he was now head gamekeeper.

Squire Arden was rapidly getting on in years, and he placed great reliance upon Eric.

Eric Fairfield had been well educated, and although he got into scrapes innumerable he was a great favourite during his stay at Eton. He had shown keener interest in sport than lessons, although he was an apt scholar when in the humour. Eric had figured in the eleven against Harrow, and had proved himself a good oarsman in many a stiff pull on the Thames. He had held his own in the athletic world, and was a good runner and boxer. Few lads at Eton could swim better, and Eric Arden Fairfield's record as an all-round athlete was remarkably good when he left Eton.

A fine, manly-looking young fellow was Eric Fairfield at the age of two-and-twenty. A man after the Squire's own heart. "Just the sort of lad I'd have had of my own," said the Squire, with a sigh, as he thought of that fatal fall in the hunting field.

"And he is your own, William," said his sister. "I feel Eric is quite as much yours as mine. He loves you as a father."

"He's a good lad, Harriet," said the Squire. "You ought to be proud of him."

"I am," said Harriet Fairfield, proudly, and there was no need for her to say more.

Arden Hall was in the beautiful midland county of Nottinghamshire, about half-a-dozen miles

from Newark-on-Trent. In the midst of a great sporting country, it was small wonder that Eric Fairfield had grown up devoted to horses and dogs, and loved hunting, shooting, and racing ardently.

Squire Arden, in days gone by, had kept racehorses, and even now he occasionally had one or two of his own breeding in training. The expenses of a heavy racing establishment, however, he could not afford.

Arden Hall was a favourite place for a meet of the Rufford or South Notts hunt, and they were always sure of a find on the Squire's estate. It was a pretty sight the Meet on Arden lawn in front of the old fashioned Hall, that had been built by an Arden in centuries gone by.

A hunting breakfast at Arden Hall was a repast to be remembered, and the Squire was never happier than when surrounded by the red coats, and with the music of the pack at hand.

Financially, however, matters had been going from bad to worse with the Squire.

He had, on the advice of a very old friend, invested money in mining shares in the hope of making a rise. The West Australian speculations had not turned out well, and Squire Arden was saddled with a heavy loss, which it took him all his time to meet.

In all matters affecting himself the Squire was a reserved man, and neither his sister nor her son had any idea of how matters stood.

Squire Arden considered the situation carefully, and he came to the conclusion it was only right and

just that he should place everything before his nephew in its proper light.

"I have no right to lead him to expect a fortune at my death, which is probably what he is depending upon," said the Squire. "I'll not delay another day. Eric must know exactly how matters stand. He's a good lad, and he will take it kindly."

Squire Arden was sitting in his own room when he made up his mind to tell Eric all.

As he leaned back in his o'd-fashioned arm-chair his eyes rested on the wall above the fireplace.

Hanging on the wall was a racing jacket and cap in an oak frame and glass front.

It was an old jacket, but clean and well preserved. The colours were black body, white sleeves, and black cap.

As the Squire looked at the jacket his thoughts went back many years—back to the time when an unlucky chance had placed that jacket second in the Derby instead of first.

Good judges said a mistake had been made, and that Squire Arden's colt had won the race.

That head behind made a difference of many thousands to Willian Arden, that at the time were badly needed.

"Who knows?" murmured the Squire, as he looked at the jacket. "Fortune may favour me again some time. I've a couple of colts that are very promising, and——"

A knock at the door interrupted his meditations.

"Come in," said the Squire. "It's you, Eric, my boy. Glad to see you. Sit down, I want to have a chat with you."

"Nothing pleases me better than to have a chat with you, uncle," said Eric. "You were studying the magpie jacket very attentively when I came in. The old colours have not been seen up for some years, uncle. You ought to chance your luck again with one of those colts, they are a pair of beauties."

"You really think so, Eric," asked the Squire.

"I do; I have seldom seen colts more promising," said Eric.

"If I ever run one of them in a big race, Eric, the jockey shall wear that jacket and cap for luck," said the Squire, pointing to the magpie jacket hanging in its frame on the wall.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE LAST CHANCE.

SQUIRE ARDEN looked at Eric in silence for some minutes. He hardly knew how to broach the subject he meant to enlighten him upon. He was not good at making financial statements, and he had received no hints in that direction from a perusal of the Budget, as he merely glanced at it to see if there was another penny on the income tax.

Eric remained seated and looked at the magpie jacket hanging in its frame on the wall.

"I suppose you think I am a rich man," said the Squire abruptly, and startling Eric from his reverie.

"I have never thought anything about it uncle," replied Eric. "What made you ask such a question?"

"Because I fancied you might be living in a fool's paradise, and counting your chickens before they were hatched," bluntly said Squire Arden.

Eric flushed. It was not like his uncle to address him in this style.

"If you mean I have been speculating on what I might gain by your death you wrong me," he

said. "Such thoughts never trouble me. Rich or poor you will always be the same to me. I can never forget your kindness to my mother and myself."

Squire Arden raised his hand deprecatingly.

"That is nothing Eric. Your mother has done far more for me than I have for her. She has brought me you, something to love and cherish, something to spend the yearnings of my tough old bachelor heart on. You have been as a son to me, Eric, and a father should never deceive his son."

"You spoke strangely," said Eric, "I could not understand you. I have always striven to behave as a son ought to his father."

"I did speak abruptly," said the Squire. "I did not know how to begin. Eric, I am not a rich man, nay more, for a man in my position, I am a poor man. Of course, there is no danger of utter ruin at present, although something must be done, my boy, to revive my fortune. It is about this I wished to consult you. You are a man now, Eric, and I want both your advice and assistance."

"Surely your affairs are not very complicated," said Eric, as he looked round the comfortable room.

"Arden Hall takes a lot of keeping up, my boy, and rents are not what they were," said the Squire. "I have never saved much money, and although the income decreased, I am afraid the expenditure did not follow in the same direction. I speculated in West Australian gold mines. Hang me if I would not have preferred to lose the money on the

racecourse than to see it sunk in such an outlandish spot as Coolgardie."

"The racing form of speculation would have been more to your taste I should say, uncle. Coolgardie would be a bit too far off for my money—that is, if I had any," added Eric, with a laugh.

"It is no laughing matter, Eric. We must economise," said the Squire. "The difficulty is where to commence."

"Cut down expenses," said Eric.

"Cannot be done," said the Squire. "There is not a hand too many on the Arden estate."

Eric thought of the number of men employed in doing nothing, but he knew his uncle would prefer to deprive himself than allow a single hand to be discharged.

"Sell some of the horses," said Eric.

"How dare you, sir?" said the Squire, banging his fist on the table. "Sell the horses, indeed! You'll want me to give up keeping half-a-dozen hunters next, I suppose?"

"That is what I should advise," said Eric, highly amused at the old Squire's indignation.

Squire Arden stared at him in amazement. The bare idea of an Arden of Arden Hall being called upon to exist without his hunters had never entered his head.

"Let me tell you, sir, I shall do no such thing," said the Squire. "Where will you get a mount next season I should like to know, if I sell my hunters?"

"One horse will do for me, uncle," said Eric.



"But it won't do for me," said the Squire. "I have never had less than half-a-dozen hunters in my stables, and I never will have."

"Then we must look elsewhere for a reduction in the expenditure," said Eric. "Raise the rents."

"Never," said the Squire. "I've promised a reduction of twenty per cent. next rent day."

"That is the second time this year you have reduced your rents twenty per cent.," said Eric.

"Bless me, so it is," said the Squire; "I reduced them last rent day."

"You have too many horses on the estate. Sell some of them," suggested Eric.

"And probably part with a Derby or Leger winner," said the Squire. "No, that will not do, Eric."

"Sell a portion of the estate," said Eric."

"Another suggestion like that," said the Squire, savagely, "and I'll disown you. Sell the estate! You must be mad, boy."

"Raise money on it," said Eric, who enjoyed teasing his uncle, and who did not suspect matters were as black as the Squire tried to paint them.

"Mortgage Arden Hall?" roared the Squire, "I'm ashamed of you, Eric. You must be turning Radical."

"Can you suggest anyway out of the difficulty?" said Eric.

"Yes, I can," said the Squire. "We'll train those colts and win a fortune with them."

"And in the meantime?" asked Eric.

"We will go on as we are doing," said the Squire.

Eric laughed heartily.

"You are a clever hand at a scheme of retrenchment and reform.

"There's another Radical expression, sir. Retrenchment and reform. I never heard of such absurdities in my young days."

It would probably have been better for him if he had, Eric thought, but he's a grand old fellow and I wish I could help him.

"Are you very short of cash, uncle?" asked Eric.

"Short is not the word, Eric. I am starved out in that direction."

"Not even enough ready to go on with?" said Eric, smiling.

"A few thousands." said the squire. "We are not quite dead beat yet, Eric, but its coming, my boy."

"Then we must stop it. In the meantime, uncle, don't worry yourself. I'm a great hand at financing, always had a liking for it at Eton."

"Had you?" exclaimed Squire Arden. "That's the first I ever heard of it. You generally were short of cash when I went Windsor way."

"I financed you then, uncle, for my own purposes," laughed Eric. "Now, I am going to finance you for your personal benefit."

The idea of his nephew financing him tickled the Squire immensely. He regarded it as a huge joke.

"And when do you commence running me as a limited liability company," asked the Squire.

"At once," said Eric. "Will you give me permission to sell some of the horses, uncle? I will not touch the hunters or thoroughbreds."

"On those conditions, yes," said Squire Arden. "I was not aware, however, we had too many on the estate."

"We can do with ten less," said Eric, "and they go under the hammer."

"Very well," said the Squire, "that settles it. You must tell me what you are going to do, Eric."

"All in good time, uncle. One thing I am going to do is to find out which of these colts is the better, and then I'm going to win you a big race or two with him."

"It will cost a lot of money, Eric," said the Squire. "That is not a scheme of retrenchment."

"But I am certain either of these colts is good enough for anything," said Eric. "You have entered them in the Two Thousand, the Derby, the St. Leger, the Eclipse Stakes, and a heap of other races. You have spent a small fortune in forfeits: I am going to get all that money back for you. Why, uncle, you have entered five or six young ones every year for goodness knows how many years in nearly all the big races, and have never even started a horse."

"Custom, my boy, custom," said the Squire. "It's a way I got into, and I couldn't leave it off."

"You must have paid thousands in forfeits. All are paid up, of course," said Eric.

"Yes," said the squire. "To tell you the truth, Eric, I have often thought what a confounded fool I was when I had to pay that list of forfeits. I entered horses that ought never to have been nominated, and when they were put up for sale no one would buy them with their liabilities attached."

"I don't blame them," said Eric. "When I have sold the horses you gave me permission to dispose of, I mean to buy a good steady horse to lead the young ones in their work. They have not run yet, and will be all the better for keeping until next year. Then they will be fresh as three-year-olds, instead of half ruined by being galloped off their legs as two-year-olds."

"A good idea, Eric," said the Squire. "Buy a reliable horse to school them with. But who is to train them?"

"Caunton and I will manage it between us," said Eric.

Squire Arden smiled as he replied, "Do you think Ned Caunton is quite up to training in these days. He has trained many a good one in years gone by; but he is not very well acquainted with the modern systems."

Ned Caunton had been with Squire Arden many years, and was a man well on in the sixties. When the magpie jacket was seen on the racecourse, Caunton generally trained the horses that carried it, and it had been his lasting regret that his master had almost forsaken the turf.

Eric Fairfield stuck up manfully for Ned Caunton in reply to the Squire's question.

"I would back him against most of the new men," said Eric, "and give them all they know in."

"Have your own way," said the Squire, "but remember the exchequer is low, Eric. You have to replenish it, not dip into it, and my experience has been it is generally the latter in racing."

Eric went off in high spirits. He did not really think there was much wrong with his uncle's finances, although he knew he must be temporarily short of ready cash. He walked rapidly in the direction of Ned Caunton's cottage, which was on the Arden Hall estate. Meanwhile Squire Arden walked on the terrace with three of his favourite terriers at his heels, and a huge St. Bernard at his side. He had one hand on the huge dog's head, and in the other he twirled a cigar between his fingers.

He walked to the far end of the terrace, lighted his cigar, placed his elbows on the stone wall, and gazed thoughtfully at the landscape before him.

Hundreds of times had Squire Arden let his eyes wander over this well-known scene. It was a picture he was never tired of looking upon, and he had seen it in all kinds of weather.

It was indeed a fair and charming scene. Stretched out before him were meadows rich with juicy herbage, hedgerows blossoming with flowers, magnificent trees, centuries old many of them,

giant oaks, graceful beeches, waving ash, and huge outspreading chestnuts. The country was splendidly timbered, and on the Squire's estate it was seldom a tree was felled. The river Trent could be seen winding in and out, and shining and glistening in the sunlight. Many a struggle with a pike had the Squire had in the ponds near its banks, and the barbel had given him plenty of sport.

The cows were quietly crunching the rich grass, and the sheep were wandering contented and at ease. It was a charming rural scene, such as fair Nottinghamshire can show in many places.

Squire Arden sighed as he looked at it all.

"A glorious county," he said to himself. "No, I could never part with the land belonging to me. It would break my heart to leave dear old Arden. Eric little knows what a struggle I shall have to make both ends meet during the coming years remaining to me. Is it my fault, I wonder? To a certain extent it is, but I have lost money in attempting to make more for the lad. The boy, bless him, is full of confidence in his new scheme. He may succeed. Old Ned has not lost his cunning in training. He may see the magpie jacket first past the post again. It is the last chance, and I must trust it to be a good one."

The old Squire never for one moment thought his heavy expenditure at Arden Hall and elsewhere had anything to do with his reduced fortune.

He could no more have changed the life at Arden Hall than he could have changed himself.

His way of living had been born and bred in him. He had never been a very rich man, but he had given freely of his substance more generously than many men with ten times his income. He was too old to change now.

Squire Arden was not the man to be long in a depressed mood. The fit of despondency soon left him.

When he returned into the house his troubles were well nigh forgotten.

He met Eric in the hall.

"Well, my boy, what does old Caunton say?" asked the Squire.

"Ned says tell the Squire it is the best day's work he has done for years in giving you permission to train and run those colts. Tell him the magpie will be in front next year, and that he has never owned a better horse than Cannon Ball," said Eric.

"Good news, indeed, my boy," said Squire Arden, heartily. "I look upon it as my last chance, Eric. We must have a talk with Ned. Tell him to come round in the morning."

## CHAPTER III.

## A TRUSTY SERVANT.

NED CAUNTON resided in a comfortable, old fashioned cottage on the Arden estate. A modern trainer, with his splendid mansion and luxurious surroundings, would probably have treated with contempt an offer to take up his residence at Ivy Lodge.

Ned Caunton had been employed at Arden for over forty years, and he was looked upon by the men on the estate as "part of the property." Ned Caunton had married one of the servants at the Hall. No child was born unto them until ten years after the marriage, and then a baby girl appeared upon the scene.

Caunton's wife died when the child was six years old, and since then the father had regarded Ruth as his sole object in life, the prop upon which he relied in his old age.

Ruth Caunton was now in her twenty-first year, and was a bright, lady-like woman. Her father had given her a good education, the best he could afford, and Ruth had been quick to profit by it. There were few handsomer women



than Ruth Caunton when, mounted on one of Squire Arden's hunters, she appeared at the meet on the lawn.

Eric Fairfield and Ruth had always been the best of friends. They were, so the Squire said, much too good friends for any danger of their falling in love. They seldom quarrelled, a sure sign, the Squire insisted, that matrimony was not in their line.

Had he thought Eric would fall in love with Ruth Caunton, Squire Arden would have endeavoured to keep them apart. He had his notions about marriage, although he had never tried the lottery himself. He would not have considered Ruth a suitable match for the heir to Arden Hall. He liked Ruth immensely, and she was often invited to the Hall, and Mrs. Fairfield acted as a mother to her.

"They are good playmates," said the Squire, "but mind, Harriet, it must go no farther. There must be no love-making nonsense between them."

Harriet Fairfield smiled as she replied:

"I do not think there is any danger of their falling in love, William. They are brother and sister, nothing more."

And so the years had gone by, and Eric and Ruth had grown up together at Arden Hall, except when separated during their school days.

Ruth Caunton was greatly admired, and had received two or three offers of marriage, which had been declined.

"Father has no one to look after him," she had said, "and I shall stay at Ivy Lodge until he is tired of me."

The morning after his conversation with the Squire, Eric went to Ivy Lodge.

He was always sure of a welcome there. Ned Caunton had taught him to ride, and had also instilled into his mind that horses were the most noble creatures in the world. The trainer had taken a great fancy to Eric as a lad, and he respected him now he had arrived at man's estate. He did not fear any danger to Ruth from her friendship with Eric, and he firmly impressed upon her the difference in their positions in life.

"I had a chat with the Squire after I left you last night," said Eric, as he shook hands with Ned, and sat down in his comfortable sanctum. "He is fully convinced we shall do some good with the colts."

"And am I to train them?" asked Ned Caunton, eagerly.

"Yes," replied Eric. "I told the Squire we could manage it between us. I fancy my share will be limited to looking on and watching the wonderful improvement you will make in the youngsters."

"I am glad the Squire has decided to let me train them," said Ned. "I thought he might have sent them to Newmarket. There is no better gallop anywhere than the mile and a half we have below the Hall. It was well laid down some years

ago, and is better than ever it was. I have always had it kept in good order, in case the Squire might change his mind and put two or three in training again."

"There was no fear of the Squire sending his horses to Newmarket when he had you here, Ned," said Eric. "We had better walk up to the Hall and see him. I said I would come over and fetch you. Where's Ruth?" asked Eric.

"Gone to Newark," said Ned, and Eric saw a slight shadow of disappointment flit across his face. "Hector Norton rode in this morning, and said he was going to Newark to Nicholson's to see about some machinery. He asked if I would let Ruth go with him; and, as she seemed eager for a ride, I gave my consent. All the same, I'm not very partial to that young man, Mr. Eric."

"He's not a bad sort," said Eric. "He's a little too fast for me, but I get on very well with him. I don't think he means any harm, but he has had too much of his own way. Does Ruth like him?"

"I think she likes him better than any of her acquaintances," said Ned. "Of course, I am not including yourself. You are almost like a brother to her."

"I'm very fond of Ruth," said Eric. "She is the jolliest girl I know." I don't wonder at Hector Norton admiring her; it shows his good taste."

The Nortons were wealthy people, residing at Beechwood, a couple of miles from Arden. Norton and Son was well known as one of the first lace firms in Nottingham. Hector Norton was an only son, but had four sisters, and as a natural consequence had been allowed to have his own way in most things.

"He admires Ruth," said Ned; "he has told me as much. But his father would not allow him to marry my girl. He's a purse-proud man, and has a mighty idea of his importance since he bought Beechwood and became a county magistrate."

"Ruth is a match for any man," said Eric. "If it comes to a question of 'blood,' Ned, I'd back your family against Norton's."

Ned Cauntton laughed. "We are a very old family in the county, Mr. Eric, but I am afraid age has not increased our value as regards money matters."

"You are better off than I am," said Eric. "The Squire says he's hard up," said Eric, laughing.

"Ned Cauntton looked at him seriously.

"Did the Squire say that?" he asked.

"Not exactly in those words," said Eric. "He said he had lost money, and that it was his last chance to recover it with these colts. I don't think he's on the verge of ruin. You need not look so serious, Ned,"

"It has cost the Squire a heap of money to run Arden Hall as he has done all these years," said

Ned. "It costs him more than it does Mr. Norton, at Beechwood. He may be short of money. I never thought of that."

"If he is, we must replenish his exchequer," said Eric.

"We will have a good try to do so," said Ned.

When they reached the Hall the Squire was waiting to receive them.

"Sit down, Ned," said Squire Arden. "I suppose Eric has told you it is my intention to have the colts trained?"

"Yes Squire," said Ned Cauntton. "I am very glad you have decided to train them at Arden. The track is in first-rate order."

"Is it?" said the Squire. "That's your doings, I suppose?"

"It is, replied Ned. "I thought you might change your mind some day, and want to see the old colours up again," and he glanced at the magpie jacket.

"Did not I tell you," said the Squire, it was not worth while keeping the track in order as I should not require it again."

"You did, Squire," said Ned.

"And you have deliberately disobeyed my orders. After all these years you ought to understand I mean what I say," said the Squire.

"I thought—" began Ned.

"You should not have thought," said the Squire. I am here to do the thinking. What are you smiling at?" he added, turning to

Eric. "Do you imagine I am not capable of thinking?"

"Certainly not, uncle," said Eric. You will I am sure think Ned Cauntton has done quite right in keeping the gallop in order."

"Perhaps I may, but he had no business to disobey my orders. What do you think of the colts, Ned?" asked the Squire.

"Both good ones, much above the average. Cannon Ball I fancy is the better of the two. He's more dash about him than Primrose. They ought to be stayers, being by Petronel and Barcaldine, and out of such good mares as Worsted and Lady Mentmore."

"The two best mares I have," said the squire, "Yes, it would be strange if Cannon Ball did not turn out a stayer. Petronel from Worsted sounds good enough for a Leger. Eric thinks of buying a useful horse to lead them in their work."

"It will be a good plan," said Ned. "I think we can easily pick up a fair horse for the purpose. It will be as well to put the colts into work at once."

"The sooner the better," said the Squire. "I have not seen Ruth for the last day or two. How is she?"

"Very well, thank you, Squire," said Ned.

"She has ridden to Newark this morning with Hector Norton," said Eric. "That would be a good match, uncle."

"For Norton, said the Squire. It would be a better match than he deserves. Ruth's

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too good for a son of old Peg Norton. What an ass that man does make himself. I will never sit on the bench when he is present. I wonder who will be made a magistrate next? Does Ruth like young Norton?"

"I think she does," said Ned. "I can't say I do. Mr. Eric says he's not a bad sort of fellow."

"He's a much nicer young man than he might have expected to be, considering who his father is," said the Squire. "Fancy old Peg buying Beechwood. I should not be at all surprised if he had the impudence to make a bid for Arden Hall next."

"What should you say if he did, uncle," asked Eric.

"Say, my boy. Nothing. I should act. I should forcibly eject Peg Norton from the premises," said the Squire.

"And figure in the court under the heading of 'Serious assault by a magistrate,'" laughed Eric. "Why do you call him Peg Norton, uncle?"

"Because it is the name he is best known by in the county. He commenced life by hawking pegs in a donkey-cart," said the Squire.

"Seems to have got on well," said Eric.

"He has. He must be a very rich man" said the Squire. "That, however, does not do away with the fact that he hawked pegs. I think Ruth is qualified to adorn the home of a better man than the son of a peg-hawker."

"I rather like Hector Norton," said Eric.

"The lad's all right, but I cannot stand old Peg," said the Squire.

"Then it is settled the colts shall be taken in hand at once, Squire," asked Ned.

"Certainly, and I hope you will be as successful with them as you were with my horses in days gone by," said the Squire.

"I will do my best," said Ned, "and I have some good material to work upon. We shall see the magpie jacket in front again before long."

"I hope so," said the Squire. "I am not as well off as I was twenty years ago, Ned. A good stake or two of ten thousand pounds would come in handy."

"If we have luck I should not wonder if Cannon Ball wins the next Eclipse, uncle," said Eric.

"I'd sooner see him win the Leger," said the Squire.

"We'll try and win both with him," said Ned.

"The Two Thousand we can miss," said Eric. "But one of them may be ready for the Derby."

"We shall see how they go on," said Ned. "They have not done much work yet. They are big colts and will take time. I almost think it would be better to keep them for the end of next season. I don't believe in hurrying horses along. You've always had bad luck in the Derby, Squire."



"So I have, Ned," said the Squire. "I won it once, and did not get the race. I want to win the Leger. That's the race I have set my heart upon."

"You shall win it if the colts are good enough," said Ned. "I have not forgotten how to train a Leger winner yet."

"Do your best, Ned. I shall be satisfied," said the Squire.

When Ned reached Ivy Lodge, he found Ruth had returned.

"You have not been long, Ruth," said her father.

"No. We had a quick ride, and Mr. Norton was not detained long in Newark," she replied.

"Do you like Hector Norton very much?" asked her father.

"Yes," said Ruth, frankly. "He is a very amusing companion."

"Do you think he would make a good husband, Ruth?" said Ned.

"I never thought of him in that capacity, father," said Ruth, with a hearty laugh. "I am quite content to remain with you at Ivy Lodge until you turn me out."

"You are a good girl, Ruth," said Ned Cauntton kissing her; "but you will settle down in a home of your own some day. When that time does come I hope you will be happy, and that your choice will be a good one."

"I shall never marry unless you approve of my choice, father," said Ruth. "Don't you care for Hector Norton?"

"Not much," said Ned. "He a bit too fast to make a good husband."

## CHAPTER IV.

## NORTON AND SON.

It was true, as the Squire had stated, that Hector Norton's father had commenced life as a hawker of pegs in the county in which he was now a magistrate and a land owner.

Robert Norton had a great idea of his own importance. He was a purse-proud man. He was ashamed of his humble origin, and the very sight of a clothes-peg made him shudder.

He was a narrow-minded man, and his one object in life had been, and still was, making money.

When Robert Norton purchased Beechwood he felt he had made a step in advance, and when his name appeared on the roll of county magistrates he knew it was a rise in the social scale. He was not, however, regarded with much favour by the old county families, although Hector Norton and his sisters were popular.

Robert Norton was a successful man, and in his early days had scraped and saved every penny he could get. His wife was a motherly old soul, uneducated, and had the appearance of a comfortable cook, which, in fact, she had been.

Mrs. Norton was not at all ashamed of her humble origin; in fact, she occasionally boasted about it, and related to her amused guests what a desperate struggle she and her husband had to get on during their early married life.

Robert Norton, when he had saved enough money bought a share in a Nottingham lace factory, and it was not very long before he had the concern in his own hands.

Some men appear to have a special aptitude for making money, and Robert Norton was one of these men. He was a daring speculator, and often succeeded where other men would have failed through sheer lack of pluck. As soon as Hector Norton came of age he was admitted a partner into the business, and the firm changed to Norton and Son.

Hector Norton was Robert Norton's weak point. The father could never be brought to see that his son did wrong. He liked to hear his son talked about, and hold his own with the county people.

Hector Norton was rather inclined to go the pace, and several pretty factory girls had been the object of his attentions from time to time when he first went into partnership with his father.

As he grew older he saw it was not to his interests to carry on these flirtations, and consequently he dropped the acquaintance of his former objects of admiration, much to their disgust.

One girl, however, declined to be dropped in this offhand manner, and Hector Norton felt he should have some trouble with her.

Amy Jackson was employed as a typewriter at Norton and Son's. She was a quiet, respectable girl, and good-looking. She had been flattered at first by Hector Norton's attentions. He had favoured her more than any other girl in the establishment, and she weaved a romance of her own out of his attachment to her.

When a woman yields herself to a man, she loses her influence over him.

Amy Jackson thought otherwise. She made the fatal mistake of trying to bind Hector Norton to herself by listening favourably to his proposals, which were not of a nature calculated to ensure her welfare.

Like many another unfortunate woman, Amy Jackson had discovered, when too late, that Hector Norton was not a man to be faithful to his promises.

He was kind and liberal to her, but he declined to make her an honest woman. Amy Jackson was not the woman to calmly sit down and keep her grief and wrongs to herself.

She would not be discarded in an offhand manner, and Hector Norton discovered that his intercourse with Amy Jackson was not a thing to be lightly cast aside.

Amy Jackson had right on her side. She did not believe the woman should bear all the suffering and disgrace while the author of her shame was allowed to go free.

Much to Hector Norton's dismay he found Amy Jackson did not want money, she demanded he should redeem his promise and make her his wife.

He had argued with her, but to no purpose. Amy Jackson would not be contented unless he made her Mrs. Hector Norton. This he determined he would not do.

"Then you shall marry no one else," said Amy Jackson.

"I shall do exactly as I like," said Hector Norton. "I have done all I can for you, Amy, and you must be reasonable."

"I am reasonable, Hector," she said. "I want you to make me an honest woman. Through you I lost my self-respect, it is through you I must endeavour to regain it. I will make you a good wife, Hector. I shall not disgrace you."

"My father would not hear of it," he replied. "He would dissolve the partnership, and cut me off without a copper. What could we do then?"

"Work," said Amy Jackson. "Your father had to work in his younger days. My family is quite as good as your own."

"That is a matter of opinion," said Hector, "and I do not care to argue the matter with you. Once for all, Amy, I tell you I am willing to make you an allowance, but I shall not marry you."

"We shall see," replied Amy Jackson. "If I hear you are going to be married, I shall certainly let your intended wife know the sort of man she is about to entrust her happiness to."

Hector Norton was not the man to let such a threat trouble him long. He dismissed Amy Jackson from his mind, and commenced to pay his attentions to the young ladies who were invited to Beechwood, and more especially to Ruth Cauntton.

It was his father's ambition to see Hector Norton married into a good family.

"We've got the money, Hector, what we want is blood, and blood I mean you to have, my boy, if money can buy it. You must mind what you are about. These old county families are a stuck-up lot, but with the money at your back, my boy, you can fight their prejudices down," said Robert Norton.

"That's more easily said than done," replied his son. "Money makes no difference to some people. Take old Arden for instance."

"Hang old Arden," growled Norton. "He's a stiff-necked old idiot. I should like to get him out of Arden Hall. I'd give a trifle to buy the place over his head, and have him turned out neck and crop. He's always insulting me; I wonder you ever go near the place. If you had any respect for me you'd keep away, there's no attraction there. You don't lower yourself by hanging about that Cauntton girl, I hope, like a lot of the young fools do," asked his father, as he suddenly thought of Ruth.

"I can't think what makes you so prejudiced against the Squire," said Hector. "He's always civil enough to me, and Fairfield is a jolly good fellow."

"I tell you old Arden's a meddling old fool," said Robert Norton. "He makes me a laughing stock. He declines to sit on the bench with me, D—— him! He calls me Peg Norton. Isn't that enough?"

"People tell you all this to annoy you, governor," said Hector. "Squire Arden is much too polite to overstep the bounds of good taste."

"Is he?" said Robert Norton. "The old beggar's nearly ruined. He's lost a heap of money lately, speculating in West Australian mines. More fool he. If he's not very careful I'll have Arden Hall before long. I hear he's gone in for racing again. He's bound to loose a lot more money at that game."

"He has put a couple of horses in training," said Hector. "That won't do him much harm, and old Ned Caunton knows how to train a horse."

"Does he?" growled Robert Norton. "Pray who told you that? I hope you are not ass enough to go backing horses."

"Sometimes I have a flutter," said Hector.

"Then I beg you will not have any more flutters, as you call it. I'll not have my hard-earned money fooled away on that rascally horse-racing," said his father.

Hector Norton thought it better to drop the subject.

"By the way, that Amy Jackson has been annoying me again," said Robert Norton. "She pesters me to take her on again as typewriter.



I can't have people about here who are ill for four months at a stretch. It's my belief that young lady is not quite as demure as she looks. I fancy she's a deep one."

"She is a remarkably quick girl in the office," said Hector. "I should take her on again if I were you."

Robert Norton looked hard at his son.

"What do you want me to take her on again for? You don't often trouble yourself about the girls. Have you any particular liking for Amy Jackson?"

"None at all, governor," said Hector. "All I know is she did her work much better than anyone else we have had."

"She's a hard worker," said his father. "I'll make her an offer. She'll come back for less than she earned before. Every shilling tells in these times, my boy."

Hector Norton looked glum, but thought it better to make no remark. He detested the mean side of his father's nature.

"I've sacked old Ferguson," said his father.

"What for?" asked Hector.

"He's done for. Worn out. He's no good here now," said Robert Norton.

"He has been here many years," said Hector.

"And been paid for all he has done," said Robert Norton. "He ought to have saved enough to live upon."

"Out of thirty shillings a week?" said Hector.

"Twenty-seven-and-six, my boy. Be accurate," said his father. "I lowered him half-a-crown a couple of years ago."

"Then I call it a beastly shame," said Hector."

"Not at all," said his father. "Two-and-six a week is six pounds ten a year. I reckon that is a considerable item."

"To Ferguson, yes, but not to you," said Hector.

"I've seen the time when six ten would have been a fortune to me," said his father. "Ferguson is done. I can't keep machinery that is useless."

"Shall you do anything for him?" asked Hector.

"I have done for him, as you call it, for several years," said his father.

"How will he live?" asked Hector.

"That's not my business," said his father.

"Then it ought to be," said Hector. "You ought to pension him off."

Robert Norton laughed at the idea.

"If we pension off all the hands," he said, "we shall have to sell Beechwood pretty quick."

Hector Norton saw it was no use arguing with his father, but he determined to see that old Ferguson did not want in his declining days.

Hector Norton was popular in the factory. He was of a much more generous disposition than his father. "Old Peg" was not a favourite in the house of Norton and Son.

Amy Jackson was re-engaged by Robert Norton, and Hector coming into the office one morning was glad to find her installed in her old place.

"I'm glad my father has taken you back," he said.

"So am I, Hector," she replied. "He said you had persuaded him to do so, but you can do more for me than that if you will."

"I thought you had given up that romantic idea," said Hector. "Be a sensible girl, Amy. We can be good friends, nothing more."

"I came back here to be near you, Hector," she said. "Your father has lowered my wages."

Hector Norton muttered something about his meanness.

"I will try and get them raised to the old standard," he said.

"It is not my wages I want raising, Hector," she said, "I want to raise myself—my esteem."

He made an impatient gesture, and walked out of the room.

Amy Jackson went on with her work, but her thoughts were elsewhere. Her fingers moved mechanically over the keys.

"I wonder if Hector will ever do the right thing by me," she thought. "He must. It is not for myself alone, but for the child. I could not bear him to grow up and learn his mother's disgrace. No, I would sooner kill him. I will be patient. All will come right in the end. He will not marry; he dare not."

"Confound her," muttered Hector, to himself, "I thought she would be grateful to me for getting her back into the office. I can't marry her. That's impossible. There's Ruth. I wonder what she would say if she heard the truth from Amy? There's not much fear of their meeting, that's one consolation. I think Ruth likes me. She is a splendid girl.

"Expect the governor would object, but he'll have to give way in the end if she will have me. Old Ned I can see does not care much for me. I must keep in Eric's good books. He'll help me with Ruth. Its very evident he does not love her. What an awful fool I was to go so far with Amy. Hang it all, it was as much her fault as mine. She ought not to have encouraged me.

"I must try my luck with Ruth. I do not think she would give a man up in a hurry if once she loved him. The governor says the old Squire is hard up. Wonder if it is correct. Hang it all, I like the old man. There's no humbug about him, at all events; he always says what he means. The governor is very bitter against him.

"I must have a plunge on the Squire's colts if they are good enough. Eric will tell me what chance they have. I shall have to keep the governor in the dark as to the extent of my betting transactions. I don't think he'd relish it if he knew the amount I have had to pay out lately. No luck at all. It must change soon; if it does not, I shall be in a hole, and then he'll have to help me out whether he likes it or not."

Hector Norton had been betting heavily during the past twelve months, and at the present time he owed more money than he could conveniently pay. Taking one consideration with another, Ned Caunton was not far out when he said he thought Hector Norton was a bit too fast to make a good husband.

## CHAPTER V.

## A PROMISING COLT.

NED CAUNTON did not let the grass grow under his feet when he received the Squire's instructions to put the two colts in training.

Cannon Ball and Primrose had been handled for some months, and were thoroughly tractable.

Eric, acting on Caunton's advice, bought a five-year-old, called Honeydrop, to act as schoolmaster, and right well the horse did his work.

Winter was now coming on, and there was every sign it would be severe.

"We're in for it, Mr. Eric," said Ned Caunton one morning as they stood watching the young ones at exercise. "I feel certain we are going to have a hard winter. That will throw us back considerably, but I'm not sorry. I would much prefer to keep both colts for their later engagements."

"You may be wrong, Ned, but it certainly looks like being severe weather. We must do the best we can. Cannon Ball has come on wonderfully. He's a promising colt, Ned. Look at him now, I never saw a more perfect mover," said Eric.

Cannon Ball came bounding along with Honeydrop, and the colt seemed to revel in the gallop.

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"He's a beautiful mover," said Ned. "And what's a lot in his favour he can stay. That's where he will have such a pull in the Leger. We have not many first-class stayers nowadays. It's a pity racehorses should be sacrificed for these big sprint races."

"I quite agree with you, Ned," said Eric. "I am afraid the thoroughbred is developing into a mere gambling machine."

Cannon Ball was a very promising colt, and as he pulled up he seemed fresh and full of life after his pipe opener. The colt had grown and filled out, and Ned Cauntton's training evidently suited him.

As they stood admiring him Squire Arden joined them, and it was with evident pleasure he looked at Cannon Ball, and noticed the vast improvement a few weeks of Ned Cauntton's treatment had effected in him.

Squire Arden was a good judge of horses, and he saw at once that in Cannon Ball he had a colt of more than ordinary merit.

"What do you think of him, uncle?" said Eric.

"A remarkably good colt," said the Squire. "I must compliment you, Ned, on the improvement you have made in him."

"He's come on wonderfully fast," said Ned. "He's a lovely temper, and has given me no trouble."

"What a pity Ned kept that gallop in order, uncle," said Eric.

"You young rascal," laughed the Squire. "When shall I hear the last of that, I wonder."

"We might win a race or two with Honeydrop," said Eric; "he looks like making a jumper. I should like to try him over a country some day."

"Take him out with the hounds; it will not do him any harm," said Squire Arden.

"I will, with your permission, uncle. He'll be a splendid mount. I don't think there will be many to beat me at the finish on him," said Eric.

"He's a bit of a puller," said Ned. "I don't think he would be a very safe mount. He's excitable, too, and in a big field of horses he would be more so than usual."

"Eric's a good rider," said the Squire. "He's only a young fellow. We old men are apt to get cautious. Never fear, Eric will be able to master Honeydrop, or any other horse he has a mount on."

"I know he is a first-rate rider," said Ned, "but he's venturesome, and on a horse like that he might be tempted to go too far for his safety."

"I'll be careful with him," said Eric. "At any rate, I will try what he's made of the first time the hounds meet at Arden."

The colts having finished their work were being quietly walked back to the stables, and Ned Caunton followed them.

"If we have a severe winter Ned thinks the colts will not be ready very early," said Eric.

"You may rest assured it will be severe," said the Squire. "I have not lived here for over half a century without being able to tell the signs in this neighbourhood. By the way, Eric, the



poachers have been active lately, and the pheasants have been going to market rapidly. Stubbins has engaged an extra man. I think his name is Jackson, and he comes from Nottingham. He's a man Stubbins has known for some years, I believe. He wanted an extra keeper, so I told him to look out for one."

"We must put this poaching down," said Eric; "its becoming serious. When Bob was a taker of game instead of a keeper, he had some influence with these fellows and kept them off your land. Now I fancy they delight in poaching at Arden for the simple reason that Bob is head keeper. They look upon him as a deserter to the enemy."

"There is probably some truth in that," said the Squire. "It was a good day's work when Stubbins was taken on as a keeper."

"It was good for himself and also for you, uncle. That man is as honest as the day now. It only shows what a man will do when he gets a fair chance given him," said Eric. "I have not met this new man, Jackson, yet."

"He's only been here a day or two," said the Squire. "I know nothing of him myself, but Stubbins vouches for him, and says he could not have secured a better man."

"Then he is all right, you may depend upon it, uncle," said Eric. "Trust Bob not to engage a man he knows nothing about."

Hiram Jackson was the father of Amy Jackson, employed at Norton and Son's, and it was a strange

chance that brought him to Arden Hall and the vicinity of Beechwood.

He was a respectable man, and had been a miner and earned good wages. When a strike took place he was thrown out of work, through no fault of his own, as he had been dead against the men going out. The majority, however, in the union ruled, and Hiram Jackson had to go out on strike whether he liked it or not.

The colliery proprietors had managed to keep the mine going, and when the strike ended they declined to turn out the men who had helped them in their difficulty, and refused to put the old hands on again.

Hiram Jackson had been out of work some months when he accidentally met Bob Stubbins in Nottingham.

"Down on your luck, Hiram," said Bob.

"Yes," said Hiram. "I've had no work for months. Can you find me anything to do?"

"We want an extra keeper at Arden," said Bob. "You're the very man, Hiram. You're not used to the work, but I'll soon put you up to all the wrinkles. There's one thing, if it comes to a rough and tumble with a poacher he'd have to go under, I reckon. You know a bit about game, Hiram," said Bob, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"All I know you taught me," said Hiram. "We've been out together in the old days, Bob."

"So we have," said Bob Stubbins. "We've caught game in our time together, now we'll catch poachers."

And so it was arranged that Hiram Jackson should go to Arden.

Amy Jackson had been afraid to tell her father the name of the man who had got her into trouble.

Hiram Jackson felt his daughter's disgrace keenly. He was a passionate man, and it would have gone hard with Hector Norton had Hiram obtained an inkling that he was the man who had wronged his daughter.

"He had threatened to turn Amy out of doors if she did not tell him the name of her betrayer; but she had remained firm, and Hiram Jackson loved his erring child too well to drive her away from home.

"It runs in the blood," said Hiram to himself. "Her mother left her on my hands when she was a chit, and went off with my mate. Curse him! Curse 'em both! But I'll not let Amy go down any further if I can help it. I'll find out the name of the scoundrel who has betrayed her, and, by the Lord! if he doesn't marry her, it'll be the worse for him."

Amy Jackson did not waver in her determination to conceal the name of the father of her child.

She still hoped Hector Norton would marry her, and she felt her father would not mend matters by creating a disturbance with Hector, as she knew he would do, if she told him all. She loved Hector Norton dearly, although he had wronged her, and she feared what her father might do in his anger.

After Hiram Jackson had met Bob Stubbins, he went home; and when Amy returned from her work, he said: "I've got work at last. I'm sorry it is so far away; I shall have to leave home. Can you manage without me?"

"I'm sorry you are going away, father," said Amy. "Is it on my account you are going?"

"No," he said. "Can you manage? There's the child."

Amy said she could get on very well. She would go into lodgings until her father returned.

"What little furniture we have, father, I can have stored. It will not cost much."

"Yes; that will be best," said Hiram.

"Where are you going to?" asked Amy.

"I met Bob Stubbins, and he's engaged me an extra keeper at Squire Arden's at Arden Hall," said Hiram.

Amy's heart gave a great leap, and she almost jumped from her seat.

"What's the matter?" said Hiram.

"I thought I heard baby," she said.

"Nonsense!" growled Hiram. He could not bear the thought of the child.

"Arden Hall is near Beechwood, is it not, father?" she asked.

"Yes. Nortons live at Beechwood, don't they?" he asked.

"Yes," said Amy. "How strange you should be going there?"

"Yes, it is a bit curious," he said. "I'm to go to-morrow."

Amy Jackson had very little rest that night. She wondered what strange fatality had brought about her father's departure to Arden Hall. She had an undefinable dread that something terrible would come of it; what, she did not know, but her father's presence near Beechwood and Hector Norton she felt would have serious consequences.

Would it be better to tell him all before he went? No, she could not do that.

Then she thought it would not be likely her father would see much of Hector Norton, and even if he did he would not be likely to learn he was the father of her child.

She was foolish to frighten herself in this way.

And yet she would rather her father had remained out of work than go to Arden Hall.

She determined to put Hector on his guard, so that if he happened to meet her father he would be careful. It would be far better if they never met; but that could hardly be avoided if Hector went to shoot at the Hall, as he had often told her he did.

She put on a cheerful face when her father bid her good-bye.

"You'd better tell me the name of that man before I go," said Hiram. "I might come across him some day."

Amy's face paled as she said: "Don't ask me, father. He will marry me, I am sure, when the right time comes.

"The right time is past, Amy," he said, sadly. "Cheer up, my lass. Never fear, but I'll find him

some day, and then he'll have me to reckon with, not you. He'll find that rather a different matter."

So Hiram Jackson went to Arden Hall.

He little thought it was a step fraught with the most serious consequences.

Amy Jackson told Hector Norton the first opportunity she had that her father had gone to Arden Hall. She also told him of her fears.

Hector Norton laughed at her and said there was no danger she need be afraid of. He would take good care to give her father a wide berth. All the same he could not help feeling it was a curious coincidence, to say the least of it, that Hiram Jackson should have gone to Arden Hall.

"He might see me with Ruth," thought Hector, "and he might mention that interesting bit of information to Amy. Then there would be ructions. It would be far better for Hiram Jackson to be down a coal mine again than prowling about Arden Hall."

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE MEET AT THE HALL.

THE hunting season had commenced in earnest and Squire Arden seldom missed a meet. He was an ardent lover of hunting, and a bold rider, even at his age.

Few men in the hunting field were better mounted than the Squire, and no man rode straighter to hounds. Eric Fairfield was popular with the members of the Rufford and South Notts., and he was always well mounted.

He was a capital pilot for some fair horse-woman over the country, and he took good care not to lead them into danger.

So far Eric had escaped heart whole from these belles of the hunt, although he was partial to the company of one or two.

It was a splendid morning when the Rufford hounds met for the first time in the season on the lawn at Arden Hall.

A fixture at Arden Hall was always well attended, as it generally meant a quick find and a good run, and the country was not too stiff, just dangerous enough, to lend additional excitement to the sport. The sight from the Hall terrace was charming.

On the spacious lawn were the hounds, eager to commence operations.

The huntsman had very little trouble in keeping them in order. Will Goodman had been huntsman to the Rufford for many years. He knew his hounds and they knew him, and at a word they obeyed him.

They were grouped about Will Goodman as he sat on his powerful bay hunter. Some were laying down, others looking round and inspecting things generally.

About a hundred persons on horseback were present, the bulk of them well mounted.

The scarlet coats and the various riding costumes of a more sombre hue made an attractive picture.

A hunting breakfast at Arden Hall was always enjoyable. Squire Arden did things in an excellent way. He gave a hunting spread in the olden style and everyone was welcome.

Carriages were grouped on the drive, and scores of lookers-on had assembled from the surrounding district.

It could easily be seen Squire Arden was a popular man. Wherever he went he was greeted in a hearty manner, and he had a word for everyone.

Hector Norton and his sisters, Nora and Ethel, were present, and Mrs. Norton had been driven by one of her daughters to the meet.

Ruth Caunton, surrounded by several gentlemen, was one of the best-looking girls present. She was



mounted on a fine roan mare, an especial favourite with her, and also a pet of the Squire's.

Eric had mounted Honeydrop, determined to see how the horse would face a country, and if he would fence as well in a run as he did in private.

Honeydrop was restless and seemed excited by the surroundings, and Eric thought it advisable to keep him on the outskirts of the crowd. Consequently he was separated from the bulk of the people.

Hector Norton rode up with his sister Nora, and Eric showed his pleasure at meeting them.

He nodded to Hector, and bowed to Nora Norton.

"What a fine horse, Mr. Fairfield," said Nora Norton. "I do not remember having seen you on him before.

"This is the first time he has been tried in the hunting field," said Eric. "His name is Honeydrop, and he acts as schoolmaster to my uncle's colts, Cannon Ball and Primrose."

"He must be fast then," said Hector. "He looks like galloping, but is not a very safe mount, I should imagine.

"He's a safe jumper at exercise," said Eric, "and although he is a bit fractious, I think a smart run will do him a lot of good. I have an idea I shall be in at the death to-day," laughed Eric.

"That will not be the first time," said Hector Norton. "Not many members of the Rufford can say they have been in at the death as often as you have."

"If you mean to be there to-day," said Nora Norton, "I shall follow your lead, that is, if I can."

"Do not follow me to-day, Miss Norton," said Eric, earnestly. "I am always too pleased to act as your pilot, but I think Honeydrop might get you into a tight fix."

"And what about yourself," asked Nora. "I hope he will prove a safe mount," she added, showing a pretty anxiety on Eric's account.

"I have no fear of that," said Eric; "but being his first run he will want managing."

Squire Arden rode up and greeted the Nortons with a cheery "good morning."

"What do you think of Eric's mount, Miss Norton?" asked the Squire.

"He is a beautiful horse," replied Nora; "but I am afraid not a very safe mount."

"You must be careful, Eric," said the Squire. "I must go and see Sir William, I have not met him this morning."

Sir William Singleton was master of the Rufford hounds, and a popular baronet. Although over forty he was a bachelor, and many a fair follower of the hunt would have been glad of the chance to become Lady Singleton.

"How well Ruth Caunton looks on horseback," said Nora.

"Yes, she does," replied Eric. "She is one of the belles of the hunt. Do you not think so?"

"I certainly do," said Nora, who was a thoroughly unaffected girl, and had not a spark of jealousy

in her. She was Robert Norton's youngest daughter, and her mother's favourite.

Hector Norton had ridden forward, and was now talking to Ruth.

"They are a good-looking pair," said Eric.

Nora Norton gave a quick glance at Eric. Her face brightened visibly as she saw the look on Eric's handsome face.

"He is evidently not in love with Ruth," thought Nora.

"Do you think Ruth cares much for my brother," asked Nora.

"She always seems pleased to be in his company," said Eric.

"I am very fond of Ruth," said Nora; "she is such a genuine girl."

"I am glad you like her, Miss Norton," said Eric; "she has been almost a sister to me. We have grown up together. I am very fond of Ruth."

There could be no mistaking his tone. He evidently regarded Ruth Caunton as a dear friend, nothing more.

"Hector is very fond of Ruth," said Nora.

"So it seems," said Eric, laughing. "They look perfectly happy in each other's society."

"I wish Squire Arden and my father were better friends," said Nora; "I am so fond of the Squire."

Eric was never tired of hearing his uncle's praises sounded.

"I think it is your father's fault they are not better friends," said Eric; "he has never given

the Squire a chance to become better acquainted with him."

Eric looked at Nora Norton, and it suddenly struck him she was a very charming girl. He thought he had never seen her look so well.

Nora knew she was at her best that morning, and she was pleased to see Eric's evident glance of admiration.

Nora Norton liked Eric Fairfield better than any of her male acquaintances. They had so far been very good friends, and she meant if possible their present cordial relations should continue.

Ethel Norton, her eldest sister, had, however, made up her mind Eric Fairfield ought to pay his attentions to herself. She saw Nora talking to Eric, and became restless.

"There's Nora at it again with Mr. Fairfield," she said, to her mother.

"So I see," said Mrs. Norton. "I think Mr. Fairfield is smitten with Nora."

"Nonsense, mother," said Ethel, "and for goodness sake do not use such a word as 'smitten,' mother. Nora is only a child; she has only just left school."

"She is eighteen," said her mother.

Ethel Norton did not care to be reminded of Nora's age. She was the eldest in the family, and being five of them, and Nora eighteen, did not make this reflection more pleasant.

"You really ought to speak to Nora, mother," said Ethel. "She is too forward with Mr. Fairfield."

"There you are wrong," said her mother. "Nora is not a bold girl; she's been well brought up. I wish I had."

"Mother!" said Ethel, warningly.

Mrs. Norton was given to talking louder than was necessary, and there were several people within earshot.

"You are too mighty particular, Ethel," continued her mother. "When I and Bob were courting, we never cared who knew about it."

"Mother! be quiet, they will hear you," said Ethel.

"I've said nothing I'm ashamed of," said her mother. "I won't be domineered over by you, Ethel."

Meanwhile Hector Norton and Ruth Caunton had been entertaining each other.

"There's Hector with that girl again, mother," said Ethel.

"And a very nice girl she is," said Mrs. Norton. "I admire Hector's taste."

"You had better not let father hear you say so," replied Ethel.

"And pray why not?" said Mrs. Norton.

"Because he expects Hector to make a better match than by marrying the daughter of Mr. Arden's trainer," said Ethel.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs. Norton. "Ruth Caunton is a well educated, superior girl. If she'll have Hector, he'll be lucky."

"Mother, you are too ridiculous," said Ethel. "How could Hector possibly marry Ruth Caunton."

"Your father married me," said Mrs. Norton. "Ruth is quite as good a match for Hector as I was for Bob."

"Do be more circumspect, mother," said Ethel. "Times have changed; our circumstances have changed; it is quite a different thing now. Father is Mr. Norton, of Beechwood, which makes all the difference."

"Too much difference," sighed Mrs. Norton. "I was far happier in a cottage, and so was Bob if he'd only have the pluck to own up to it. I wish I'd never seen Beechwood."

"How can you say such things, mother? You should think of your family," said Ethel.

"That's what I am thinking of," said Mrs. Norton. "You would all have more chance of being happy if we had never come to Beechwood."

Ethel Norton knew it was very little use arguing with her mother when she was in this frame of mind.

"Good morning, Miss Norton," said Sir William Singleton. "I hope we shall give you a good run to-day, you have a capital mount."

Ethel Norton made an appropriate reply, and Sir William moved on.

"Fine woman that," thought Sir William, and then a smile hovered over his face as he thought of Robert Norton, and he easily understood Squire Arden's antipathy to the man.

Robert Norton would have been very much surprised had he known that his wife was much more popular in the neighbourhood of Arden and Newark than himself.

There was something genuine about Mrs. Norton that made her a favourite.

She was one of those women who, although uneducated, are never vulgar. "Peg" Norton was both. His vulgarity was noticeable in all his actions. He boasted of his wealth, and bullied his servants and his wife whenever he got a chance.

A move was made for Arden coppice and the conversational parties were quickly broken up.

"I shall keep in your track, Mr. Fairfield," said Nora. "Please give me a lead, I am sure you will not get me into any danger, and I do enjoy a good gallop."

"You had better not have me as your pilot to-day," said Eric. "If you do follow me, be sure and look well where you are going, and watch how my horse behaves. If he turns nasty leave us to ourselves."

"I will be very careful," said Nora.

Arden Coppice was seldom drawn blank, and it was only a few minutes before the music of the pack was heard, and a fox scudded away in the direction of Willoughby Hill.

"We're in for a stiff run," thought Eric. "It's a grand country the old fellow's heading for. It will try your mettle before you get to the end of it, Honeydrop."

Honeydrop was pulling hard to get his head, but Eric kept him well in hand. The horse was excited and nervous, and was not by any means a pleasant mount.

"Keep him in hand, Eric," said the Squire, as Honeydrop galloped past him.

"I'll do my best, uncle," shouted Eric. "He won't keep this up long.

Nora Norton was following hard in Eric's track, and she saw his horse was a powerful, excited creature, but she knew Eric was a rider it was difficult for any horse to get the better of.

It was a glorious gallop, and the fox headed straight as a line for Willoughby Hill.

"When he reaches Willoughby he'll turn to the left," thought Eric. Then he'll make for Hurley Gorse. It will be a long run and a strong run. You brute, be quiet! Steady boy," said Eric, as Honeydrop tried hard to master his rider.

The horse fenced well, and although he struck the first two jumps he was now clearing them in his stride.

Eric cast a quick look behind him, and saw Nora Norton following a short distance in the rear.

There were not half-a-dozen horsemen in the same field as himself and Nora Norton.

"If you keep this pace up much longer you'll be done," said Eric, to himself. "I must try and save you a bit, or we shall never get to the end of the run. By Jove! he jumped that splendidly. Steady, boy. I wonder if Nora's mount will keep up at this pace. Yes, there she is," as he glanced over his shoulder. "Jolly girl, Nora! The best of the bunch. How well she looked this morning. I never noticed she was so lovely before. What a contrast to her sister Ethel. She is worth half-a-dozen of that strong-minded lady. That's a nasty fence. Here goes."



Crash, and Honeydrop went through instead of over the hedge, but galloped on at a great pace.

The efforts he had made were commencing to tell on the horse, and Eric felt with satisfaction that the strain on his arms was relaxing.

"The run of the season," said Eric to himself. "I'm glad I took Honeydrop after all, he's about the only one we have who could keep up this pace. I wonder where the Squire is. He'll not be far out at the finish anyhow."

Nora Norton was keeping Eric in view, and although her horse was going well, she felt he was tiring. She was a good rider, and nursed him as much as possible.

She meant to be in at the death with Eric.

## CHAPTER VII.

## NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL.

THE fox that was leading the Rufford at such a merry pace evidently knew his business, and as Will Goodman remarked after the run, he "had been at that game before."

He scudded along and soon left the bulk of the field far in the rear.

When he came to Willoughby Hill, as Eric had anticipated, he skirted it to the left and made in the direction of Hurley Gorse.

They were now running across a level country and the fences were negotiable to any average hunter.

The hounds followed the scent at a great pace, and the fox had to exercise all his cunning in order to beat them.

Honeydrop had now fairly settled down, and Eric was enjoying his ride immensely.

Field after field was galloped across, and at last Hurley Gorse loomed in view.

The fox by some strange chance, however, doubled before he reached there.

He ran about two miles to the right of Hurley Gorse, and then turned again in that direction.

"Wonder what he's up to," thought Eric.

There were only half-a-dozen horsemen up with the hounds, and Nora Norton to her intense delight was the only lady present.

Her horse was done, but she urged him on, and he struggled gallantly.

Hurley Gorse was reached, and the fox managed to throw the hounds off the scent.

This caused a check, and Will Goodman was busy trying to lay them on again.

Nora Norton came up, and Eric said—

"I congratulate you, Miss Norton, on being the only lady to keep up with the hounds. It is the fastest run we have had for many a season, and I do not think we have finished yet."

"Thanks to you I have enjoyed it thoroughly," said Nora. "I should not have been here if you had not been my pilot."

"Good riding had more to do with it than I had," said Eric.

Nora smiled, as she said, "So you think I am a good rider. As good as Ruth Caunton?"

"That is a difficult question to answer," laughed Eric; "but to-day at any rate you have proved yourself better than anyone."

"There he goes," said Nora, excitedly, and sure enough the old fox was seen creeping along the hedge in the next field.

Will Goodman quickly threw the hounds on to the scent, and away they went again at a merry pace.

"He'll make for Raven Mill," said Will Goodman, "sure as fate, and then we shall lose him

and have a fifteen mile ride home into the bargain."

"We're in for it now," said Eric, "and I shall see it out. Follow me, Miss Norton."

What a run it was. The fox headed for Raven Mill as straight as a dart. Nora Norton felt her horse was failing and could not last much longer. To make matters worse he had hurt one of his fore legs and went slightly lame.

As Will Goodman had predicted, the fox reached Raven Mill and there the hounds lost him.

"What a run," said Eric, as he dismounted to give Honeydrop a rest.

The horse was blown but not beaten. He stood with his legs stretched out, his head down, and his nostrils extended, his heavy breath steaming in the now frosty air.

"Where's Miss Norton?" said Eric.

"Here she comes," said Will Goodman, "and her horse is lame, Mr. Fairfield."

Nora Norton rode up slowly.

"I am afraid my horse is dead beat," she said, "and, what is worse, he is lame."

Eric examined the horse's legs, and after a careful scrutiny, said:

"You will not be able to ride home on him, Miss Norton. Perhaps you had better take Honeydrop. He is quiet enough after the run," he added with a smile.

"Oh, I could not do that," said Nora. "How would you get home?"

"Walk," said Eric.

"But it is fifteen miles to Arden," said Nora.

"We will say a dozen miles," said Eric. "I do not think that will hurt me. We can leave your horse at the Mill. It will be well taken care of. If you will dismount I will change the saddles."

He was evidently determined she should dismount, and with his assistance Nora sprang lightly to the ground.

Eric quickly changed the saddles and then looked round. The few horsemen who had seen the finish of the run had gone. Only Will Goodman and the second huntsman remained.

"I am sorry I cannot offer you a mount, Mr. Fairfield," said Goodman, "but I have to see the hounds to the kennels, and we have a long way to go."

"Don't mention it, Will," said Eric. "Sir William will be sorry he was not up at the finish. He is seldom far away."

"His horse fell lame," said Goodman, "and I don't think he came up with his second mount."

Eric took Miss Norton's horse to the Mill, and then returned to her side.

"He will be all right there, Miss Norton," said Eric. "It is nothing very serious, but it is far better you should not ride him home. Now will you try what sort of a lady's hack Honeydrop is?"

"It is too bad," said Nora, when she was seated in the saddle. "You are very kind to me."

"You deserve it after that run," said Eric. "Not many ladies can keep up with hounds at that pace."

"If you walk home, shall we—we——" hesitated Nora.

"Keep each other company," laughed Eric, finishing the sentence for her. "Certainly, if you will allow me to act as escort on foot. It is a fair exchange, Miss Norton. I lend you Honeydrop, you give me the pleasure of your company for a few hours."

Nora looked pleased.

"Do you consider that an equal exchange?" she asked.

"I think the balance is decidedly in my favour," he replied.

"It will be dark before we reach home," said Nora. "I wonder what Ethel will say! I shall never hear the last of it. She will be sure to make out it was all my fault, and that I did it on purpose."

"Did what on purpose?" asked Eric, looking up into the girl's bright face. "Lamed your horse on purpose?"

"No, I did not mean that," said Nora, with a slight blush. "I meant—oh, never mind what I meant, Mr. Fairfield, it is of no importance."

Eric walked by her side, and Honeydrop went along in an easy style that suggested he was glad of a rest.

Nora Norton and Eric Fairfield had never been alone together for such a length of time. The

twilight was gradually sinking into night as they wended their way through the still lanes and by-roads.

Nora became silent, and it was not often she was in a quiet mood. Eric, too, seemed to be in deep thought. Presently he said:

"I am rather glad your horse fell lame, Miss Norton."

"Why?" asked Norah, her heart beating fast.

"Because it has given me the opportunity of this quiet walk home with you," said Eric.

"And is that a pleasure to you?" said Nora. "I am afraid I have been an uninteresting companion. I seem to have very little to say for myself."

"Sometimes there is a silence that is understood better than words," said Eric. "Tell me your thoughts during the last quarter of an hour," he said suddenly; and as he put his hand on the saddle it touched Nora's, and she did not withdraw it.

"Will you tell me yours?" she asked. "That would be another exchange."

"Hardly a fair one," said Eric. "My thoughts were very precious."

"And I suppose you think mine were not worth much," said Nora. "That is a poor compliment to yourself."

"You were thinking about me?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said Nora, softly. "What made your thoughts so precious, Mr. Fairfield?"

"They were about you, Miss Norton," said Eric.

"I do not think there is anything very precious about me," said Nora, laughing. "Ethel calls me a tomboy, and says I am far too forward for my age."

"You are nothing of the kind," said Eric, indignantly. "You are a very charming young lady."

"Thank you," said Nora. "I did not know you were such a good hand at paying compliments."

"I am not paying compliments," said Eric, "I mean it."

"Really! It is too good of you to say so. I daresay if the truth were known you have all the while been thinking what a nuisance I am for causing you all this trouble," said Nora.

"I can assure you I have enjoyed the walk immensely," said Eric.

"Better than the company," said Nora, archly.

"You are too severe," said Eric. "The company could not have been better."

It was now dark, and as they reached the cross-roads Eric said, "We will turn to the left. It is a short cut to Beechwood, and I must deliver you safely there."

"How far are we from Beechwood?" asked Nora.

"Only about a mile," said Eric.

"How quickly the time has passed. Are you very tired?"

"I should never be tired in your company, Miss Norton," he replied.



"You say that because you think it will please me," said Nora. "I would much rather you said what you really do think."

"I have told you the truth, Miss Norton—Nora," commenced Eric.

Honeydrop started as a man got over a gate into the road and interrupted Eric's remark. Nora reined him in quickly, and Eric sang out—

"Confound it, man, didn't you hear the horse coming along the road? You might have caused an accident, springing over the gate in such a manner. It was enough to frighten the steadiest horse."

"How did I know there was a horse coming?" growled the man.

"Who are you?" said Eric, going towards him. "You had no business on Mr. Norton's land."

"Hadn't I? How do you know?" said the man.

"I know all the men on Arden and Beechwood," said Eric. "And you are not one of them."

"And what if I ain't? Can't a man take a near cut home. You mind yer own business, young man, or it may get yer into trouble?"

Eric saw the capacious pockets of the man were bulging out, and he suspected he had been poaching.

"You had better be civil," said Eric. "Remember there is a lady present. I suspect you have been poaching by the look of your pockets."

"Then ye'r wrong again," said the man. "Lady indeed. I didn't know they went about country lanes at dark with young toffs like you."

Eric caught the man by the collar.

"You ruffian," he said, shaking him. "How dare you?"

"Here, leave me alone, or it'll be the worse for you," said the man, as he struggled out of Eric's grip, and made a dash at him with the blackthorn stick he carried.

The blow struck Eric on the arm, but it was not very severe.

Nora Norton gave a faint cry of alarm as she saw Eric stand up to the man, and endeavour to wrench the stick from his grasp.

In the struggle the stick fell to the ground, and Eric, planting a well-directed blow between the eyes, landed the ruffian on his back.

"I'll be even with you for this some day," said the man, as he scrambled to his feet and made off quickly.

"Oh, are you hurt?" said Nora. "Did he hit you with that stick?"

"I am all right, Miss Norton," said Eric. "The stick caught me on the arm. It was not a severe blow. I think the brute got the worst of it."

"I am so glad you are not hurt. It is all my fault," said Nora. "I heard the man threaten you. These poachers are such dreadful creatures. I hope he will do you no harm."

"I am not at all afraid," said Eric. "Fellows like that are generally cowards."

"Here we are at the gate," said Nora. "Will you come in?"

"Not to-night," said Eric, opening the gate, and leading Honeydrop up the drive.

"Do, please," said Nora. "Mother will be so glad you have brought me safely home."

"As you please," said Eric.

Nora sprang from the horse, and ran up the steps.

A peal at the bell brought the man-servant to the door, and Mrs. Norton came into the hall very excited and uncomfortably red in the face.

"Good gracious, Nora, where have you been? It is after eight o'clock. We thought something dreadful had happened."

"My horse fell lame," said Nora, "and Mr. Fairfield lent me his. Tell someone to hold Mr. Fairfield's horse," she said to the servant.

Eric entered the hall, and shaking hands with Mrs. Norton said:

"I am very pleased to have been of some slight service to your daughter, Mrs. Norton. Her horse fell lame and she could not possibly ride him home, so I lent her Honeydrop."

"How very kind of you, Mr. Fairfield," said Mrs. Norton. "Do come inside and rest. How tired you must be."

Eric, nothing loath entered the room.

"Where's Hector, mother?" said Nora.

"Out somewhere," said Mrs. Norton, "and Ethel has gone to her room."

Eric remained at Beechwood about half-an-hour, and then took his departure, as he felt the Squire would be anxious about him.

"Good-night, Mrs. Norton," he said. "I am glad I have been able to help your daughter out of her difficulty."

To Nora he said quietly :

"I shall not forget to-night. I must see you again soon. May I call?"

"Yes," said Nora, with a frank smile. "I shall be very pleased indeed to see you."

He pressed her hand, and the look he gave her made her thrill with pleasure and happiness.

Eric borrowed a saddle, and rode Honeydrop quietly home.

"I wonder what the Squire will say when I tell him," mused Eric. "He will not like the idea at first, but he will get accustomed to it. He must. Nora is the dearest little girl that ever lived. Yes, the Squire must sink his prejudices for once in a way."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## BEECHWOOD.

BREAKFAST at Beechwood meant any time between eight and ten.

Robert Norton was generally the first to partake of the morning meal and the morning paper. Of the two he would have preferred to miss his breakfast.

If the market movements were satisfactory, Robert Norton had a hearty breakfast. If they were of a contrary nature a cup of tea and dry toast was all he required.

He would have considered it a personal affront for anyone to have interrupted his perusal of the "Guardian."

Hector Norton and Mrs. Norton timed their arrival at the breakfast-table to suit Mr. Norton's arrangements, and he had scanned the commercial news before they sat down.

Nora Norton, the morning after her ride home with Eric Fairfield, came down earlier than usual.

She had no desire for a *tête-a-tête* meal with Ethel, who was always the last to appear.

Something had evidently put Robert Norton out on this particular morning.

When Hector saw the paper flung behind his father's chair, he looked at his mother, and her glance following his she also saw the discarded journal.

The paper was in a heap crushed and crumpled, protesting as much as a paper could against the ill-usage it had received.

"Where's Nora?" said Robert Norton.

"She is not down yet," said his wife.

"I can see that for myself," he growled. "Then she ought to be down. What does she mean by gadding about the country at all hours of the night with young Fairfield? I won't have it; it's not respectable. Besides, I don't like young Fairfield; I hate the whole breed of 'em."

"Nora could not possibly help it," began Mrs. Norton.

"She ought to have helped it. You encourage her in her flirtations with Fairfield. I won't have it. Confound you, what are you grinning at," said Robert Norton to Hector, who could not avoid smiling at his father's absurd outburst of temper."

"Something tickled my fancy," said Hector.

"Then I beg you won't have your fancy tickled in my presence. If you do not know how to behave at the table you had better leave it," said his father.

"All right, governor, I'm not particularly hungry, and what little appetite I had you have not improved."

He rose to leave the table, when his father said angrily—

"Sit down; how dare you sir; have I not told you I will not be called governor? It is not respectful."

"And I do not think you are behaving respectfully to my mother," said Hector.

"Your mother is my wife," began his father, when Hector chimed in.

"So I have always understood."

"Hector," said his mother, appealingly.

"There's no need for you to interfere," said Mr. Norton to his wife. "I can manage this young man."

"You are not going the right way about it," said Hector. "I knew there would be a row directly I saw the paper."

The mention of the paper turned his father's wrath in that direction.

"Hang the paper," he said. "Those meddling press fellows ought to be put down. You have not read the paper, I have. There is a most insulting paragraph in it about our firm. Here read it for yourself," he said as he reached the paper, and pointed out a paragraph to Hector.

It was a mild remonstrance against the practice of the firm of Norton and Son, of discharging their old hands when they had become infirm and unable to work at their best.

"I see nothing outrageous in this paragraph," said Hector, "I quite agree with the writer's sentiments. I do not think it is right to use the best years of a man's life and then turn him adrift."

Robert Norton glared at his son. The paragraph had hit him in a sore place, and he had winced as much as a man with so little feeling could.

"I shall bring an action against the paper," said his father. "Its libellous, that's what it is."

"It is true," said Hector.

"The greater the truth, the greater the libel," said his father.

"More's the pity," replied Hector. "If you bring an action against the paper for that paragraph, you will be the laughing stock of the county. For once in a way take my advice and the paper's advice. Don't bring an action and don't discharge any more old hands in the manner you did Ferguson."

"That's the man. He's put them up to this. He shall starve before I will help him," said Mr. Norton.

At this inopportune moment, Nora Norton entered the room, looking as happy and free from care as any innocent maiden in the land.

"Oh, here you are," said her father.

Nora saw something had gone wrong, and she would have beaten a retreat had it not been too late.

"Good morning, father," she said. "Has anything upset you?"



"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said her father. "If such a thing happens again, I shall know how to deal with you."

Nora looked astonished.

"What have I done?" she asked.

"Done," angrily replied her father. "Done enough to ruin your reputation in this part of the county, at any rate."

"I have done nothing I am ashamed of," said Nora. "If you are alluding to my ride home last night with Mr. Fairfield, I may tell you at once that under similar circumstances I should do exactly the same thing."

"There; that's what you call bringing up a child to honour her parents," shouted Robert Norton, to his wife. "A pretty mess you have made of it. I'll be bound you encouraged her when she reached home last night."

"I asked Mr. Fairfield in, and thanked him for seeing Nora home," said Mrs. Norton, "if that is what you call encouraging her."

"You're a fool—" began Mr. Norton, in a rage.

"Mother, you had better leave the room," said Hector.

"No, she won't leave the room," said her father, banging his fist on the table.

This action on his part brought about a catastrophe. In banging the table Mr. Norton also banged the hot-water jug, and its contents, which were somewhat scalding, streamed over his hand and gently coursed down his coat sleeve.

He jumped up with alacrity, and used language as heated as the water. In doing so he trod on the cat, and that domesticated creature gave a yell calculated to startle any ordinary mortal.

Robert Norton cursed the cat, and gave a terrific kick at her. He missed the cat, but hit the chair, and barked his shin.

His rage would have been ludicrous had it not been pitiable. It was some moments before he could recover his breath to say :

"You're all in league against me. A nice family for a man to be hampered with. You've a loving lot of cherubs. Mrs. Norton you ought to be proud of your children." With this parting shot at his wife he limped out of the room.

Mrs. Norton felt inclined to cry. She was a good-natured dame, and loved her children dearly.

Hector would have laughed outright had it not been for his mother, and Nora Norton felt relieved that her father had been compelled to beat a retreat.

Such scenes were not uncommon at Beechwood. It was evident that increased wealth had not brought increased happiness to the Nortons.

"Your father is very angry," was all Mrs. Norton could bring herself to say.

"Yes, he is in a slightly excitable mood," said Hector. "He will calm down, mother. By the time he reaches home to-night he will have forgotten all about it."

Mrs. Norton was not so sure about that. She dreaded encountering her husband alone after the scene at breakfast.

"I will go and see if your father requires anything," she said. Mrs. Norton knew very well he had left the house, but she wished to keep up appearances before her children.

"So you had a ride home with Eric Fairfield last night," said Hector.

"Yes. My horse fell lame, and had to be left behind at Raven Mill. I rode home on Honeydrop."

"What a clinking run you must have had," said Hector.

"It was splendid," said Nora. "Where did you get to? You were not up at the finish."

"No," said Hector. "But I could have been. Miss Caunton had a fall, and I stopped to assist her. She was too much shaken to follow the hounds, and I came home with her."

"Oh," said Nora, with a provoking smile. "Does father know?"

"No," said Hector. "If he had known there would have been a further outburst. He is most unreasonable."

"So I think," said Nora. Hector, are you very much in love with Ruth?"

"I have asked her to be my wife," he said.

Nora clapped her hands and said eagerly, with feminine as well as sisterly curiosity, "And what did Ruth say?"

"She asked me if my father would give his consent. She declined to give me a direct answer until she heard what his sentiments towards her were."

"But she did not say no, Hector? She did not refuse you?" said Nora.

"No," replied Hector, "I feel sure she loves me, and I am quite sure I love her."

"I'm so glad, Hector. I do like Ruth Caunton. She's a dear girl," said Nora.

"She is," said Hector, warmly. "Now what about Eric Fairfield, Nora?"

"We had a very pleasant ride home," she replied.

"Of course," said Hector, laughing. "Did he say anything, Nora?"

"Oh, yes. He said lots of things. Passed compliments and so on. Said he had never enjoyed a walk half so much before. He also knocked a man down. I did like him so much when he knocked that man down," said Nora, candidly.

Then she explained to Eric the encounter with the poacher.

"Anything else?" asked Hector, smiling at his sister's evasion of the main question.

"He came in when we reached home, and mother thanked him for taking care of me."

"Is that all?" persisted Hector.

"Hector, do not be so provoking," said Nora. "Of course he said good-night when he left."

"Yes," said Hector, "proceed."

"How tantalising you are. He asked me if he might call again and speak to me," said Nora.

"Why did you not say so at first," asked Hector, "without so much beating about the bush. Eric is in love with you, Nora."

"Don't be silly, Hector," said the girl, blushing.

"He'll propose," said Hector, "and of course you will dutifully refuse him."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Nora, and then stopped suddenly. "No I did not mean that. Indeed, I did not."

"Yes, you did, little sister. Eric is a good fellow. He will make you very happy," said Hector. "We are both in the same boat and must pull together. The governor will object to Ruth and also to Eric."

"I am afraid he will," said Nora.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Hector.

"That depends upon Eric—I mean Mr. Fairfield," said Nora.

"You do not mean to let the governor stand between you?" asked Hector.

"No," said Nora. "When it comes to choosing a husband I shall follow the dictates of my heart."

"Bravo!" said Hector. "My sentiment exactly; but we shall have a hard fight."

"And is not Ruth worth a hard fight?" asked Nora.

"She is," said Hector. "I must have Ruth; she must be my wife."

Ethel Norton entered the room, and further conversation between Hector and Nora was impossible; they could not speak of such matters before Ethel.

"Mother tells me there has been a scene," said Ethel Norton.

"Yes," said Hector; "an awful scene."

"And I do not wonder at it," said Ethel. "Nora, your conduct yesterday was disgraceful!"

"I fail to see it in that light," said Nora.

"Mr. Fairfield ought to have known better. I am surprised at him compromising a young girl as he has done," said Ethel.

"Mr. Fairfield acted as a gentleman," said Nora.

"Indeed," said Ethel, sneeringly.

"I do not see how he could have acted in any other way," said Hector.

"He ought to have left Nora in charge of Mrs. Aimes at Raven Mill, and ridden here and informed us what had become of her. It was most improper to be alone with a child like Nora all that time, and dark, too."

"I'm not a child," said Nora; "I'm eighteen."

"You have only just left school," said Ethel; "I know more about these matters than you."

"Of course you do, dear," said Nora, "you are so much older."

Ethel winced. She knew Nora could be very sarcastic when occasion required.

"I think Fairfield acted as a gentleman," said Hector. "I quite agree with Nora in that."

"Then our opinions differ," said Ethel.

"They often do," replied Hector.

"You were behaving in a most forward manner at the meet at Arden," said Ethel. "Remarks were passed about your evident preference for Mr. Fairfield's society."

"Whoever made a remark of that description was guilty of an impertinence," said Nora.

"I do not think so," replied Ethel; "I saw you myself."

"Ah!" said Nora, meaningly. "And you did not approve of my talking to Mr. Fairfield?"

"Not for such a length of time," said Ethel; "you are far too young, Nora."

"My age seems a sore point with you," said Nora. "Perhaps when I have arrived at your age I shall be more circumspect; at present I cling to the 'follies of youth.'"

"Which I hope you will not live to repent," said Ethel.

"Come Ethel, you are too hard on Nora," said Hector. "You may as well blame me for riding home with Miss Caunton."

"That is very different," said Ethel. "Ruth Caunton's position gives her more liberty. We have our standing in the county to think of."

"Ruth Caunton is our equal in every respect as far as family is concerned," said Hector, angrily.

Ethel Norton looked at her brother in amazement.

“You cannot mean it, Hector,” she said.

“But I do mean it,” he replied, hotly, “and you will probably have Ruth Caunton for your sister one of these days.”



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SQUIRE'S OPINION.

"I AM not surprised, but I am disappointed," was the Squire's comment, when Eric informed him he was about to ask Nora Norton to be his wife.

Eric was surprised at the mild way in which the Squire took his announcement. He had fully expected his uncle would be in a towering passion, and declare he would countenance no engagement of the kind.

"If you want my candid opinion," said Mr. Arden, "I think Nora Norton a very charming young lady—her charms would be considerably enhanced if her name was not Norton."

"I want to change it for her, uncle, said Eric. "When she is Nora Fairfield, you will forget she was a Norton."

"No doubt," said Squire Arden. "Have you any idea how the land lies in the direction of Beechwood, on this subject?"

"I think I am sure of Nora," said Eric, with a smile.

"Probably," replied Squire Arden, but what about old Peg Norton?"

"Surely he would not object," said Eric. "What possible grounds can he have for doing so?"

"He's an obstinate man. He would oppose it out of pure selfishness. He cannot bear to see others happy. Then there is Ethel. I have an idea that lady had designs upon you herself," said Squire Arden.

Eric laughed heartily.

"She is older than I am," said Eric. "I never gave her a thought, but I have always admired Nora, and that return from the Mill completed the conquest."

"Lucky for her she had such an escort home," said the Squire, "I am afraid hunting is responsible for many engagements. There seems to be more running after the girls than the hounds in these times. In my young days we were more enthusiastic about the real sport."

"I promised Nora I would call," said Eric. "In any case out of mere politeness I ought to ride over to Beechwood, and make enquiries after her."

"Go, by all means, Eric, and if Nora gives you a favourable answer, you may tell her your old uncle will welcome her as a daughter to Arden Hall."

"You have always been too kind to me," said Eric. "No lad ever had a father who was more to him than you have been, and still are, to me."

"You're a good lad, Eric," said Squire Arden. "You have never given me a moment's uneasiness. You played some strange pranks in your juvenile days, but I would not give a rap for a lad who had not a spark of the devil in him."

Eric rode to Beechwood with a light heart.

He thought what a fortunate man he was, and how kind his uncle had always been to him.

Then his thoughts wandered to Nora, and he wondered if she was expecting him, and what her answer would be.

"Hullo! Jackson," said Eric, as he nearly rode over Hiram Jackson, who was walking along in a very dejected frame of mind. "What's the matter, man? Anything wrong? Are you ill?" said Eric, as he glanced at the man's firm, white, pained face.

"It's not much, Mr. Fairfield," said Hiram, touching his cap. "I've had a bit of a shock, that's all. My heart's a bit weak. It troubles me now and again."

"You don't look over strong," said Eric. "You will have to take care of yourself this winter. How is your daughter? Have you heard from her?" asked Eric, as he saw an envelope crumpled up in Hiram's hand.

"No, sir—that is, yes, sir—" stammered Hiram, as he crammed the paper into his waistcoat pocket. "She's all right, thank you, sir."

"Hadn't you better go home and have a rest?" said Eric. "You look tired out. I must speak to my uncle about you; this gamekeeper's work is too heavy for you, more especially at night, and in this severe weather."

"Don't speak to the Squire, please don't, sir," said Hiram Jackson, pleadingly. "I'll take it as a favour if you won't, sir. I like the work, and I'll manage it somehow."

"Very well, Hiram, as you like. But remember, if you feel ill to let me know. You can tell Stubbins, and he will speak to me about it. Good morning," and Eric rode on.

"What a difference between him and the other one," said Hiram, to himself.

Had Eric known what was in Hiram Jackson's mind, and what bitter feelings of revenge had been aroused in him that morning he would have acted in a different manner.

When Eric reached Beechwood he sent his horse round to the stables, and went in search of Nora Norton.

It was an inopportune moment for his arrival.

The storm had blown over at Beechwood, but the inmates were suffering from the effects.

Hector Norton had gone to Nottingham, and when Eric was shown into the room, Ethel Norton welcomed him.

Ethel Norton was accustomed to conceal her feelings behind an impenetrable mask, and she did so effectually on this occasion.

Eric little suspected the volcanic action at work beneath her calm exterior.

Had Ethel Norton done as she desired at that moment, she would have given Eric to understand his presence in that house was not desirable. As it was, she said with affected cordiality—

"Good morning, Mr. Fairfield. I hope you are none the worse for your long walk last night. It was very kind of you to take pity upon Nora. She is only a child, and therefore may be expected to get into scrapes."

"I should hardly call her a child," said Eric, smiling as he thought on what errand he had come to Beechwood. "As for getting into scrapes, I hope she was exonerated from all blame last night, as there was certainly none attaching to her. Such an accident as a horse falling lame might have happened to anyone."

"She ought not to have gone after the hounds in such a mad gallop. It was dangerous and improper in one so young and inexperienced," said Ethel Norton.

"From the way Miss Norton rode," said Eric, "I should say she was anything but inexperienced. She may be young, but that I consider in her favour. I am not very ancient myself."

Ethel Norton wondered if Eric was hinting that she was older than she cared to acknowledge. She did Eric wrong; he was too much of a gentleman to give hints of this description.

Nora Norton had seen Eric ride up to Beechwood, and was determined her sister Ethel should not prevent her meeting him.

She had rightly divined her sister's intentions. Ethel Norton intended to prevent Nora having an interview in private with Eric if possible.

Nora Norton went to her mother, and as Mrs. Norton liked Eric exceedingly, she was easily persuaded to assist in routing Ethel.

Mrs. Norton entered the room as Ethel and Eric were engaged in conversation.

She at once proceeded to business, and in answer to Eric's enquiry as to Nora's health, she said—

"Nora is none the worse for her ride, Mr. Fairfield. She expected to see you this morning."

Ethel Norton looked daggers at her mother, but Mrs. Norton did not quail. She even went a step further, and said—

"Ethel, you might see where Nora is, and tell her Mr. Fairfield is here."

This was too much for Ethel Norton.

"I will ring for her, mother, if you wish it," she replied.

Nora Norton entered the room, and blushed as Eric pressed her hand, and inquired whether she had suffered any ill effects from her night ride.

It was quite evident Ethel Norton was determined to remain.

Mrs. Norton left the room, and in a few moments returned to the charge, or rather the door, and said :

"Ethel, dear, can you spare me a moment? I wish to speak to you. I am sure Mr. Fairfield will excuse you."

"Certainly," said Eric. "Your mother must be considered before anyone, Miss Norton."

Ethel Norton stifled her anger, and bowing to Eric left the room.

"Mother your conduct is outrageous. I call it positively indelicate. Mr. Fairfield could not fail to see why you called me out of the room," said Ethel.

"You ought to have had the sense to leave them together without my asking you," said her

H

mother. "There was no nonsense about me and Bob when we were sweethearts. We never cared for third parties."

Ethel Norton walked away. She knew her mother's ways, and did not relish an account of "what me and Bob did."

"Nora," said Eric. "You know why I have come ; what I have come for."

"To inquire after my health?" said Nora, demurely.

"Nora, how can you?" said Eric. "I did nothing of the kind."

"Indeed, sir," said Nora; "then I consider it very ungentlemanly of you. I suppose you would not care if I was very ill, dying from exposure to the night air."

"Will you be serious, Nora, for one moment?" said Eric.

"I never was more serious," she replied. "I consider it downright rude of you to ignore my health."

"I am not ignoring it. I have ample evidence you are quite well. You are positively radiant with health," said Eric.

"You cannot always go by appearances," said Nora. "Mine are very much against me."

"They are very much in your favour," said Eric. "Nora," he took her hand, "you know why I am here. I am here to ask you to be my wife."

Nora Norton looked lovingly into Eric's face.

She was a very honest girl. She disliked humbug. She loved Eric, and was not ashamed to own it.

"I love you very dearly, Eric," she said; "but do you not think I am too young to marry?"

"No," said Eric, "the younger we are, the longer will be our life of happiness together."

"Then, Eric, I will be your wife, or I will remain as I am," she said.

"What do you mean?" asked Eric.

Nora Norton explained what had occurred at breakfast that morning.

"I am afraid my father will not give his consent," she said.

"But he must," said Eric. "What reasonable objections can he raise?"

"I am sure I do not know, Eric," said Nora. "What I do know is I shall not give way if you will always love me as you say you do now."

What followed need not be described. It is better left to the imagination. Suffice it to say the moments passed swiftly, and both Eric and Nora were intensely happy.

"And Squire Arden sent me that message," said Nora, alluding to Mr. Arden's remark he would "welcome her as a daughter."

"He did," said Eric. "And what is more he meant it."

"He is a dear old man," said Nora. "I have always liked him."

"You will love him when you know him as well as I do," said Eric.

Mrs. Norton entered the room.

"You have entertained Mr. Fairfield, I hope," she said to Nora.



"I have done my best, mother," said Nora, with a sly glance at Eric.

"We have mutually enjoyed each other's society, Mrs. Norton, so much so indeed that we desire to see more of each other; in fact, we never want to be parted. I have asked Nora to be my wife, Mrs. Norton. I hope I have your approval."

"Bless me," said Mrs. Norton, sinking into a chair, and holding up her hands. "What ever will your father say, Nora?"

"God bless you, my children," said Eric, laughing.

"I wish he would," said Mrs. Norton. "But he won't. You can rely upon me, Mr. Fairfield. I love Nora dearly, and I am sure you will make her happy."

"I will do my utmost, Mrs. Norton," said Eric. "But why should Mr. Norton object. Does he dislike me personally?"

"Don't ask me," said Mrs. Norton. "You young people must fight your own battles. What does Squire Arden say about it?"

"He says he will be delighted to welcome Nora as a daughter," said Eric.

"Bless him. Then he's not such an upstart after all," said Mrs. Norton.

"Mother," said Nora, "how can you say such things?"

"My uncle is not much of an upstart, Mrs. Norton," laughed Eric. "He is a very amiable, kind, good-hearted gentleman, and I am sure he will love Nora dearly."

"Bob says he's stuck up," said Mrs. Norton.

Nora Norton blushed as she said, "I hope, Eric, you will not mind what mother says."

"Your mother, Nora, is like you, generous and outspoken. I trust when she knows my uncle better, she will alter her opinion of him."

"It's not my opinion, it's Bob's," said Mrs. Norton. "I always liked the Squire, you can tell him so if you care to, Mr. Fairfield."

"I certainly will," said Eric. "I must see Mr. Norton, and endeavour to gain his consent."

"I hope you will succeed," said Mrs. Norton "but I doubt it."

"I shall marry no one but Eric," said Nora, firmly.

"Ah," said Mrs. Norton, "the child's very like her mother. I always said I'd have no one but Bob, and I stuck to it."

Eric laughed as he said:

"And I am sure Mr. Norton is very glad you did so."

"I am not so sure about it," said Mrs. Norton. "He says I drag him down."

"Mother dear," said Nora, kissing her, "how can he say so? It is not true. I am sure he does not mean it."

"Mr. Norton ought to be proud he has such a wife and mother for his children," said Eric.

"And so he is," said Nora. "He only tries to irritate you, mother."

"Perhaps so, my dear, but I'm not fond of being irritated. I like peace and quietness.

Mind you give Nora plenty of that, Mr. Fairfield."

"I will remember," laughed Eric. "There will be peace I am sure, I do not know so much about the quietness," he added with a glance at Nora's merry face.

## CHAPTER X.

## AN ENVELOPE.

SHORTLY before Eric, on his way to Beechwood, had seen Hiram Jackson, the gamekeeper had made a discovery that startled him.

Hiram Jackson never ceased to brood over his daughter's disgrace, and the more he thought about it the more bitter his feelings became towards the man who wronged her.

The keeper was walking his rounds with his gun slung across his arm, when a piece of paper on the ground attracted his attention.

It was a small piece of dull-white paper, crumpled, and Hiram at first thought it was a five-pound note.

"Must have been lost by some one at the meet, yesterday," he thought, as he turned it over with his foot. He then saw it was not a five-pound note but an envelope.

He picked it up, and, as he did so, caught sight of the writing.

He gave a start as he recognised his daughter's hand.

"How does this come here," he muttered. "It must be one of my letters from her."

He smoothed it out and read :

"Hector Norton, Esq., Nottingham. Private."

With an oath Hiram crushed the envelope in his clenched hand.

"What does she want to write to him about, and mark it 'Private.' Must be about her situation."

Hiram examined the envelope, but it was empty.

"She would not write to him about her place," thought Hiram. "She'd have addressed to Messrs. Norton and Son. Can he be the man who wronged her?"

As Hiram Jackson pondered over the matter the idea became more firmly rooted in his mind that Hector Norton was the man who had betrayed his daughter.

This thought was uppermost when Eric Fairfield spoke to him, and he still had the envelope clenched in his hand.

As Eric rode on Hiram stood looking after him. "These swells are the ruin of our poor girls," he muttered. "Mr. Eric's not the sort of man to trifle with a girl; but Hector Norton is. By Heaven! if he has betrayed my Amy I'll either force him to make her an honest woman, or I'll shoot him like a dog. Curse these swells, they think they can trample on the likes of us; but, by God! I'll show him there's one man won't stand any nonsense."

"I must be sure of my ground," went on Hiram. "How shall I find out the truth. Amy won't tell me. The scoundrel he is, and courting Ruth

Caunton, too. Ruth Caunton; aye, that's the way. I'll just let Amy know how far matters have gone between Hector Norton and Ruth. I'll stretch it a bit and say they are engaged. That'll fetch Amy if I know her right. She'll never stand that if Hector Norton is the man. I'll write as soon as I get home. If it is as I suspect you had better mind how you deal with me and my lass, Mr. Norton."

Hiram Jackson went his rounds, and when he reached home sat down to write to his daughter.

The compilation of this letter took Hiram some time. He was a bad scholar, and he had to word the letter so as not to arouse his daughter's suspicions.

It took him the best part of an hour to write it, and then he was hardly satisfied with the contents.

"It'll have to do," he said, as he stuck the envelope. "I reckon that will set Amy thinking if he's the man. I shall be able to tell by her next letter."

Hiram Jackson had not long to wait for a reply to his note.

By return of post he received a letter from his daughter.

"It's him sure enough," said Hiram as he looked at the envelope. "She'd never have answered it so quick if he had not been the man."

Hiram Jackson opened the envelope, took out the letter, and proceeded to spell it out.

Amy Jackson thought there must be some mistake about the report of Mr. Norton's engagement to Miss Caunton. She understood from what she had heard in the office, and from letters that had been dictated to her, he was engaged to a lady in Nottingham. She asked her father to let her know if his news was correct, as she could hardly believe it.

"You know we girls here are fond of news of this kind," she wrote, "and I want to be certain before I mention it."

"That won't do, Amy," was her father's comment, as he put down the letter. You are the girl he ought to be engaged to. I can read he is the man in every line of your letter. Curse him!" said Hiram, savagely. "I could tear his false heart out, the smooth-faced villain. But he shall answer for it. Wait until I catch him alone. We shall see which of us is the better man then, Hector Norton."

Amy Jackson was much disturbed on receipt of her father's letter. She would not believe Hector Norton could play her false. Engaged to Ruth Caunton. The very thought turned all Amy Jackson's better feelings to stone. She would see Hector and tax him with it. If this news were true he had better beware. She would, if necessary, see Ruth Caunton, and tell her all. It would be a bitter task, but she would do it for her child's sake.

Hector Norton little knew the storm that was brewing over his head.

He was hopelessly in love, or thought himself so, with Ruth Caunton. He did not intend Amy Jackson should stand in his way; in fact, he thought very little about the girl he had wronged. Manlike he left the woman to bear the shame, and troubled himself very little about her.

The day or two after she had received her father's letter, Amy Jackson had an opportunity of speaking to Hector Norton alone.

She asked him plainly if there was any truth in the rumour that he was engaged to Ruth Caunton.

At first Hector Norton declined to be questioned, but when he saw Amy was not to be put off lightly, he acknowledged he had flirted with Ruth, but said there was no engagement between them, nor had he ever thought of such a thing. Ruth Caunton was all very well to flirt with, but he had no serious intentions towards her.

"I am glad to hear it," said Amy, quietly.

"Why?" asked Hector Norton. "What difference can it make to you?"

"If I had learned your engagement to Ruth Caunton was correct, I should have gone to see her," said Amy.

"Indeed!" said Hector. "To offer her your congratulations?"

"No," said Amy, roused by his callousness, "to tell her of my shame and your guilt."

Hector Norton was startled, in spite of his assumed indifference, at her vehemence. He thought it better to adopt a more conciliatory tone.



"You need not be angry, Amy," he said. "I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I am sorry I spoke as I did."

She was pacified easily, and said—

"I never thought you could be so base, Hector. Are you quite sure you do not care for her?"

"Ruth Caunton is a very nice girl," said Hector, "but I don't care for her half as much as I do for you. There, will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, Hector," she said. "I am sorry I ever doubted you."

"Who told you I was engaged to Ruth Caunton?" asked Hector after a moment's thought.

"I had rather not say," said Amy. "It was a mistake, we will think no more about it."

With this answer he had to rest content.

"I wonder who told her," he thought to himself as he left her. "It must have been someone either at Arden or Beechwood. By Jove! it may have been her father. He's at Arden Hall. Luckily he knows nothing, nor does he suspect anything. If he did he would have shown it in some way. He's not the sort of man I should care to have as an enemy. A dangerous fellow, I should say. I wish Squire Arden would get rid of him. I'll sound Eric on the subject, and see how he takes it."

He did sound Eric, but got very little satisfaction from the process. He learnt that Hiram Jackson was looked upon as a thoroughly reliable man at Arden Hall.

Meanwhile, Hiram Jackson was nursing his wrath, and seeking an interview with Hector Norton.

He was always on the watch for an opportunity, and at last it came.

He saw Hector Norton leave Ned Caunton's cottage one night, and followed him.

Hector Norton looked round as he heard footsteps, and saw Hiram Jackson, the man of all others he was the least desirous to meet.

Hiram had thought the matter over seriously since he found the envelope, and had come to the conclusion that violence would only get himself into trouble, and do his daughter no good. He decided that violence ought to be resorted to when all other means had failed.

Hector Norton was therefore safe as regards Hiram Jackson for the present.

"It's you, Jackson, is it?" said Hector, as the keeper came up with him. "Not on night du'y are you?"

"No," said Hiram. "I followed you, Mr. Norton. I wanted a word or two with you in private."

"It's coming," thought Hector. "But I don't believe Amy has told him. She's too fond of me for that. Wonder how the devil he made the discovery?"

Aloud he said:

"What can I do for you? What do you want to speak to me about?"

"My daughter," said Hiram, controlling his feelings with an effort.

"Indeed," said Hector, with a well-feigned air of surprise. "What about her? Is she not comfortable at the factory?"

"She's all right there," said Hiram. "D—n it, sir, you know what I mean."

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Hector.

"My daughter's had trouble," said Hiram.

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Hector. "Can I be of any assistance?"

"You can," said Hiram. "If what I believe is correct you are the only man that can be of any assistance."

"What on earth do you mean, man?" said Hector.

"My daughter's had a child," said Hiram.

"I am sorry she has got herself into trouble," said Hector. "But what concern of mine is it?"

"You are the father of her child," said Hiram, making a plunge.

The directness of the attack disconcerted Hector Norton.

"He must be certain of his ground or he would never make such a direct accusation against me," thought Hector.

"I know it's true," said Hiram. "You needn't get up a lie about it, because I shan't believe you."

"If you have made up your mind not to believe me," said Hector Norton, "it is not much use my denying it."

"You must make my daughter an honest woman, Mr. Norton," said Hiram, trying to speak calmly.

"Now look here, Jackson," said Hector Norton, "I don't know who has told you this tale. Say it is true. Let us suppose for a moment it is true. You surely do not expect a man in my position to marry your daughter. It is out of the question."

"Don't rile me," said Hiram. "I'm not a pleasant man to deal with when my temper's up. You must marry my daughter or I shall know the reason why. She's too good for the likes of you. I wonder what Miss Caunton would say if she knew the truth."

"You hound! You dare not speak to her," said Hector, angrily.

"Don't call me names," said Hiram. "Two can play at that game, and your character is easily spoilt."

"What do you want?" asked Hector. He was in an awkward fix and wished to gain time.

"I ask you to act as a gentleman and marry my lass," said Hiram. "How can a father ask anything else at your hands?"

"You must give me time to think it over," said Hector Norton. "These things cannot be decided in a hurry."

"How long will it take you to make up your mind?" asked Hiram. "There ought to be no two ways about it."

"Give me a fortnight," said Hector.

"And what'll you do in that fortnight?" asked Hiram. "Go courting Miss Caunton."

"I decline to tell you what I shall do," said Hector. A thought seemed to strike him, and he added:

"Meet me this night fortnight at Beechwood."

"How can I go to Beechwood?" said Hiram. "A likely place that to meet you."

"Never mind, you must come. I will see you alone in my father's study," said Hector Norton. "It can easily be managed. If my father or anyone sees you, I can say you came in with a message from Mr. Fairfield. You see it is easily managed."

"I don't half like it," said Hiram. "However, I'm willing to humour you if you'll do the right thing by my lass."

"If I go there," thought Hiram, "I'll force him to give me a written promise to marry Amy, or know the reason why."

"You can come round to the study window," said Hector, "at eight o'clock. We shall nearly have finished dinner then, and I can leave the room for a few moments; I will make a good excuse, never fear. The window opens on to the terrace, I will leave it open. You can step inside, and not a soul will see you."

"Then I'll come," said Hiram, "and mind you deal fairly with me and my lass."

"Is that all?" said Hector.

"Yes," said Hiram.

"Then do not forget. This night fortnight," said Hector. "The study is the third window on the left terrace. You will be sure and make no mistake. It is better you should not be seen."

"I'm not likely to forget," said Hiram, "I'll be there at eight."

"He'll have to keep quiet in his own house," thought Hiram. "He'll sign the paper to prevent a row. He must sign it, and he couldn't do that out here. Wonder why he asked me to meet him there? To save him the trouble of going out I reckon. Perhaps, after all, he means well by my lass. I hope so, I hope so."

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE MANTLE OF SNOW.

IT was a terrible winter. The snow covered the earth as in a white mantle, and in the large cities there was much poverty and distress. Although it wanted a fortnight to Christmas, the weather all through November and December had been severe.

Arden Hall looked picturesque in the midst of the white world surrounding it.

As Eric looked out of his window one morning, he thought he had never gazed upon a more lovely scene.

Everything was pure white. There had been no thaw, and the frozen ground preserved the snow in all its purity.

A heavy hoar frost fell during the night, and the trees were fringed with glittering white, the sparkling particles clinging to the branches and twigs in a thousand fantastic shapes.

Some of the branches were so heavily laden that they bent beneath the weight and drooped in graceful sweeping curves.

The hedgerows were as white and frosty as the trees, and not a blade of grass could be seen in the fields. As Eric looked in the direction of the

kitchen garden, he could see the cabbages outlined in the snow, resembling huge white footballs. Here and there an occasional speck of green appeared from a parsley-bed, or from the celery-trenches; the holly trees were showing their red berries amidst the snow, peeping out like small fiery eyes.

From the buildings icicles were hanging down for all the world like huge sticks of sweets in the confectioners' shop windows. The roofs were heavy with snow. The old-fashioned pump had its top coat of straw on in a vain endeavour to keep the water from freezing.

The window-panes were crusted over, and Eric traced hundreds of curious figures on the glass, all made by the skilful Jack Frost.

At the window he had opened the air came in biting and searching every corner, determined to oust any stray warmth that might have had the hardihood to take up its quarters there.

The keen air, however, had a bracing effect on Eric. He was young and strong, rejoicing in health and happiness, and the frosty blasts had no power over him.

In the snow he could trace the small holes made by hares and rabbits as they made a raid on the vegetables. Even the haystacks looked cold, and seemed to shrink closer under the thatch.

Away down by the training track, now as hard as stone, and covered inches deep with straw and tan, he saw the river Trent, no longer a flowing stream, but covered with ice, hard and thick enough to bear



a horse and cart. Squire Arden, during his lifelong residence at the Hall never remembered the Trent to have been frozen over in this particular spot.

"Not much chance of getting the colts into racing condition by spring," thought Eric. "Perhaps it is just as well. Ned, at all events, takes matters in a most philosophical manner."

Squire Arden chafed and fumed because the frost and snow had effectually put a stop to hunting.

"The worst winter I ever experienced at this time of year," said the Squire. "It wants a fortnight to Christmas, and here we are well nigh frozen out. I wonder what it will be like in January and February. I believe we are in for three months of it."

"Not quite so long as that, I hope, uncle," said Eric. "What an awful amount of suffering there must be in the big cities. We are well off here. I always think country folk never suffer the privations townspeople have to go through in such weather."

"They are all pretty well looked after at Arden," said the Squire. "I hope you make enquiries in the village, Eric. We must not let any of our people suffer more than we can help. Some of them are improvident, and do not endeavour to lay by a little store for the winter. Perhaps I have not set them a good example. I have saved very little for the winter years of my life, Eric."

"You have done good with your money," said Eric. "If you spent it freely you gave it

generously, and many a family has had cause to bless your kindness."

"I have done no more than hundreds of other men in my position," said the Squire. "To change the subject, how are the colts?"

"Going on splendidly," said Eric. "Of course, there is no chance of galloping them. Ned, however, thinks that is in their favour. In strict confidence, uncle, I think Ned means to try for the Eclipse Stakes at Sandown, and the St. Leger. He told me he was certain Cannon Ball would be able to give a great account of himself for the Ten Thousand Pounder."

"I should like to see Cannon Ball win the Leger," said the Squire, "he is my pet, and I prefer him to Primrose. Ned knows best, however, and I leave the matter entirely in his hands and yours, Eric."

"After a short conversation on various affairs connected with Arden, Eric said—

"There's something wrong with Hiram Jackson. The man does not seem himself at all; he has changed completely during the past ten days or so. I cannot make him out; he says he is not ill. I think he must have something on his mind."

"Perhaps he is meditating over the sins of his youth," said the Squire. He caught plenty of my game in days gone by, I'll be bound. It may prick his conscience now I've taken him on as keeper."

"I fancy the man needs rest, I don't fancy he is very strong," said Eric.

"Then let him lay up for a week or two," said the Squire. "I do not suppose there will be much need for his services this weather."

"It is very kind of you," said Eric, "but I have asked him to take a rest, and he firmly declined."

"Then there is nothing more to be done," said Squire Arden, "at all events in that direction."

What Eric had stated was quite true. Hiram Jackson was not himself by any means.

During the fortnight that had passed since he met Hector Norton, he had carefully thought out the position in which he was placed.

The more he thought over it the less Hiram liked the prospect of going to Beechwood to seek an interview with Hector Norton.

He had an instinctive dread that no good would come of it. But then what possible harm could come to himself when Hector Norton had made the proposition that he should go to Beechwood?

This was the day which he felt would terminate in a manner he had not reckoned upon.

Hiram Jackson did not feel the biting air or keen frost as he went on his rounds.

The snow crunched beneath his heavy tread like powdered salt. He wandered somewhat aimlessly about the estate. He was anxious for night to come so that he might keep his appointment at eight o'clock.

He met Eric as he was tramping about in the snow.

"Feeling any better to-day, Jackson?" asked Eric.

"Yes, thank you, sir," was Hiram's reply; "but I'll feel better after to-night."

"Indeed," said Eric. "Anything particular on to-night, Hiram."

"Yes, Mr. Eric. A tough job."

"Poachers?" said Eric.

"A poacher," said Hiram. "As bad a poacher as ever lived."

"Who is the man?" asked Eric. "Is he one of a gang? Shall you require any extra assistance?"

"No thank, you, sir. I mean to tackle him myself. I've got a grudge against him. He once robbed me of something I valued very much," said Hiram.

"Had you not better have Stubbins with you?" said Eric. "There may be a gang of them. They are a cunning lot, you know."

Hiram Jackson persuaded Eric he would have no difficulty in accomplishing the work he had taken in hand.

"Curious fellow," thought Eric. "He must have a sore grievance against this man, whoever he is."

"I called him a poacher," said Hiram to himself. "So he is, curse him. He's stolen my child's honour. There could not be much worse poaching nor that. There'll not be any moon at eight. That will be in my favour. I've taken the lay of the land, and I can walk straight to

the window. The snow will deaden all sound. No one will hear me. I haven't seen him since; but he'll not forget his appointment. He'd never dare do that. I'll go boldly into the house if he fails to meet me, and tell his father."

It was a dark, dreary, desolate night as Hiram Jackson walked through the snow on his way to Beechwood. The wind made a mournful noise as it soughed through the leafless branches of the trees. It was bitterly cold, and Hiram was muffled up to the chin, and his slouch hat was well drawn down over his head.

He met no one on the road, and soon the lights of Beechwood were seen shining with additional brilliancy owing to the dense darkness without.

Hiram skirted the fence round the garden until he came to the left terrace. He then crept through the fence and stealthily made his way to the room in which he was to keep his appointment with Hector Norton.

He made no sound as he walked along the terrace on the soft snow. The lights were all at the front and the right-hand side of the house. He meant to remain outside the window until eight o'clock. He had not much difficulty in finding Mr. Norton's study. The window was slightly open, and he had only to push it, and it would give him ample space for admission. A light was burning inside, but it had been turned down low.

Hiram Jackson, as he looked in, saw writing materials scattered about on the desk, and felt it would be a favourable chance to force Hector Norton to make a written declaration. He noted everything in the room before he entered it.

As the clock in the stable tower chimed eight, Hiram Jackson gently raised the window sash, and stepped into the room.

The Nortons had almost finished dinner, which Mr. Norton always insisted should be an elaborate meal, and prolonged for a considerable time.

"Hush, father," said Hector. "I thought I heard a window being opened."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Norton.

"I fancied I heard something," said Mrs. Norton.

"What's that?" said Mr. Norton.

Hiram Jackson stumbled against a chair in Mr. Norton's study, and its fall caused the noise.

There could be no doubt about it being a peculiar sound.

Mr. Norton turned to the man who was still waiting in the room, and said:

"Fredericks, you had better see what that noise is. I fancy it came from the direction of my study."

Fredericks went away, but took the precaution to press one of his fellow servants into the service in order to have company.

"The governor says we are to find out what that noise was. He said it came from his study."

"Did he tell you to take me with you?" asked Peters.

"Certainly," said Fredericks. "He said I had better ask you to accompany me."

"Then lead on," said Peters.

The two men went to the study door. Neither of them could be called brave. They were not anxious to try and effect the capture of a would-be burglar.

Fredericks opened the door, cautiously put his head inside, and then beat a hasty retreat.

"There's a man in there," he said, in an alarmed voice.

"Then we'd better see what he wants," said Peters.

They plucked up what little courage they had, and went in. They were two to one anyhow, which was a distinct advantage.

"What are you doing here?" asked Peters.

"How did you gain admission?" asked Fredericks, who always liked to talk tall.

"I've an appointment," growled Hiram; "I came to see Mr. Hector Norton."

"A likely tale that," said Peters. "If you'd came to see Mr. Hector Norton, you would not have got in by the window. It won't wash, my man."

"I'm afraid you're on for a burglary," said Fredericks.

"I came to see Mr. Hector Norton by appointment," said Hiram, "and I'm here to wait until he arrives."

Meanwhile Robert Norton had finished his dinner, and upon entering the corridor he heard voices in angry altercation in the study. To give Robert Norton his due, he did not feel at all afraid.

Hector Norton followed him, and both came to a stop at the door of the study.

"What is this man doing here?" said Mr. Norton.

"He entered by the window, sir," said Peters. "He says he came here by appointment with Mr. Hector," added the man, with a smile of incredulity.

"So I did," said Hiram Jackson, firmly. "There's Hector Norton, ask him."

"I never made any appointment with this fellow," said Hector. "I expect burglary is more in his line than anything else."

"You cowardly liar!" said Hiram, shaking his clenched fist at him when he saw the trap he had fallen into.

"Seize him!" said Mr. Norton. "I'm a magistrate, I'll commit him on the spot. Seize the villain, I say!"

Peters made a dart at Hiram, but received a blow between the eyes that sent him staggering back, crying:

"Murder! murder! The scoundrel is armed!"

Before any of those present could seize Hiram, he sprang through the window, and ran along the terrace.

"Pursue him!" roared Mr. Norton, "catch him! The desperate wretch to try and rob my house, and *me* a magistrate, too!"



"Stop!" said Hector. "Let him go. I know him. I recognised him. His name is Hiram Jackson; he is one of Squire Arden's keepers. We can easily track him down."

"I'll have justice," moaned Peters; "he tried to murder me! Oh, my head!"

"Be quiet," said Mr. Norton. "Get out of this, Peters; you're more frightened than hurt."

Peters and Fredericks backed out of the room.

"How long has this fellow been at Arden Hall?" asked Mr. Norton.

"About six months," said Hector. "Jackson—Jackson, I know the name," said Mr. Norton; "any relation to Amy Jackson, our typewriter?"

"He is her father, I believe," said Hector.

"Then I'll make her suffer for his misdeeds. Out she goes. I will have none of the breed at our place," said Mr. Norton.

"But she is not to blame, father," said Hector.

"I'll have him caught, and I'll let the county see what sort of men old Arden has about his place. He's got a poaching vagabond of a game-keeper, and I'll bet this is another of the same kidney. His daughter must go, Hector, I will have none of the breed about my place. The impudence of the fellow saying he had an appointment with you."

Hiram Jackson soon discovered he was not followed. He stopped running, and when he recovered his breath, muttered savagely:

"So this is what you wanted me to come to Beechwood for is it, Hector Norton? I'm a thief, and a burglar, am I? No doubt you've done it to get rid of me from this neighbourhood. Well, I may have to clear out; appearances are dead against me, and I can't let them all know of my girl's shame. I may have to go, but if I do, you had better beware, Hector Norton."

## CHAPTER XII.

## HIRAM JACKSON MISSING.

"HIRAM JACKSON has been out all night," said Bob Stubbins to Eric the morning after the affair at Beechwood.

"He told me he was going to look after a desperate poacher," said Eric, "a fellow who had done him an injury, and he wanted to pay him out. I hope no harm has befallen him. We had better search for him. I tried to persuade him not to go alone, but he was obstinate. Have you noticed anything strange about him of late?"

"Yes," replied Stubbins, "Hiram has been very queer. I'm sure he has something on his mind, sir. He'd sit for hours brooding, and never speaking a word."

"A bad sign," said Eric. "Come along, Bob, we'll have a look for him before the Squire hears about it."

They tramped through the plantation, and found no trace of Hiram Jackson. As they were crossing the road they met Mr. Norton and Hector driving towards Newark.

Mr. Norton pulled up the horse with a sharp jerk, and said:

"I'm glad I met you, Mr. Fairfield. There was an attempted burglary at Beechwood last night, by one of Mr. Arden's men."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Norton," said Eric, stiffly. "I can place the most implicit reliance upon all our men. Not one of them would be capable of such an act."

"Nevertheless, it is true," answered Mr. Norton. "Hector knew the man the moment he saw him. The fellow entered the house by my study window. I saw him and also Hector, and so did two of my servants. We tried to capture the scoundrel, but he knocked Peters down, sprang through the open window, and made off. I should have had him followed only Hector said he knew he was one of the Arden Hall men, so I thought there would be no difficulty in tracing him."

"It is quite correct," said Hector. "The fellow had the impudence to say he had an appointment with me. It was Hiram Jackson who entered our house; I saw him as plainly as I see you and spoke to him. I am very sorry, but there can be no doubt about it."

At the mention of Hiram Jackson's name Eric looked at Bob Stubbins, and the keeper shook his head.

"Hiram's been a bit queer lately," he said; "but I never thought he would go in for work of this sort."

"It shows the folly of turning a lot of poaching vagabonds into keepers," said Mr. Norton.

Bob Stubbins flushed angrily, and was about to reply, when Eric said :

"Excuse me, Mr. Norton, but my uncle is the best judge of that. He never employs a man without he can trust him."

"Hiram Jackson is a nice sample of a man to be trusted," said Mr. Norton. "I shall give information at the county police station, and have him apprehended."

"You must adopt the plan you think best," said Eric. "If Hiram Jackson was at Beechwood last night, I will not believe he went there to commit burglary, Mr. Norton."

"I am sorry to say there can be no doubt about his intentions," said Hector. "He forced his way into the house. What possible reason could he have for being in my father's study?"

"It looks black against him, Mr. Eric," said Bob Stubbins; "but I'm not a going to believe as how Hiram Jackson has turned house-breaker. I've known him a good many years, and he's always been honest."

"He's been a thieving poacher," said Mr. Norton. "As a magistrate I shall protest against Mr. Arden employing such men. His estate joins mine, and it's not safe to have burglars in the guise of gamekeepers prowling around the place. You can tell Mr. Arden what I have said."

"Tell him yourself," was what Eric was about to say, but the thought of Nora checked him. He must avoid a quarrel with her father if possible.

"I will make inquiries into the affair," said Eric. "Of course, Jackson will have to give an explanation."

"No explanation will satisfy me," said Mr. Norton. "He may prove his innocence before a bench of magistrates if he can. I do not think he will find it an easy matter."

"If you will give me time to inquire into the matter," said Eric, "before you take extreme measures against him, I may be able to offer you some explanation, Mr. Norton, of his strange conduct."

"I shall give information to the county police to-day," said Mr. Norton. "Such a man is not safe to be at large; the sooner he is in prison the better."

"I am very sorry, Eric," said Hector, "but I must agree with my father. If I had any doubt of Hiram Jackson's intentions it would be different, but I have none whatever."

"Then I wish you good-morning," said Eric, and continued his walk across the road.

"There's a beggarly young upstart for you," said Mr. Norton. "He treated me with contempt. I could see it in his face. I wonder at you associating with him, Hector. He's a penniless young brat. Wants Nora, does he? Then I'm hanged if he shall have her. The obstinate young minx; she to'd me to my face she would marry him in spite of me. "We'll see about that. Marry a man without a shilling; not if I know it. Get along you brute."

He cut the horse savagely with the whip, and nearly threw him down on the slippery road.

Hector remained silent; his thoughts were not pleasant. He knew his conduct towards Hiram Jackson had been dastardly, but he felt relieved to think the man would have to leave the neighbourhood to avoid being captured. If he were caught, Hector had but little doubt that the case would go against him. He preferred Hiram Jackson should not be caught. He merely wanted him out of the way.

Not so Mr. Norton. He was eager to see Jackson laid by the heels in order to have the satisfaction of assisting in sending one of Squire Arden's men to prison.

"What do you make of it, Bob?" said Eric.

"Blest if I know, sir, but I'll stake my existence Hiram never went to Beechwood to rob. He must have been there, but what he went for I can't imagine," said Stubbins.

"It is a very strange thing," said Eric. "It is all the more strange after what he told me about the poacher. I must get at the bottom of this, Bob."

"And I'll help you, Mr. Eric. It's no good searching for Hiram; he's cleared out. Appearances are against him, but he's gone, and take my word for it, sir, someone's done him a cruel wrong. Hiram would poach, I know, but in them days we didn't reckon taking a few hares and rabbits was stealing. We did it more for the sport of the thing than anything else. Neither

Hiram or me bagged a heap of game in order to get money out of it."

"I believe you," said Eric. "I think one half of the poachers have the same feelings as yourself. Still, we must preserve the game, or we should very soon have none left."

Hiram Jackson was missing, there was no doubt about that.

Eric related all that had passed to the Squire, and asked his opinion.

"Things look bad against him," said the Squire. "But I am of your opinion, Eric, I do not think the man went there to commit burglary. As for 'Peg' Norton's opinion of my men, he is welcome to it. In a business transaction I would as soon trust Hiram Jackson as Norton. Do you think Hector Norton asked Hiram to meet him at Beechwood? Some of these young fellows get into strange company."

"Hector says he did not ask Hiram to meet him, and I hardly think it probable he did. I can see no reason for it," said Eric.

"I'm sorry Jackson has gone," said Mr. Arden. "If he continues to hide it will confirm the impression he is guilty. Of course, Norton will give information to the county police. He revels in such things. It is in the nature of the man to do so. I hope they won't capture Jackson."

"So do I," said Eric. "Somehow I rather liked the man. From what I saw of him lately he had some trouble on his mind, I feel convinced, but I cannot connect the trouble with Hector Norton."



"Unless there is a girl in the case," said the Squire. "Had Jackson a daughter?"

"I think so," said Eric. "In the employ of Norton and Sons, I believe."

"Then the girl is sure to make inquiries here when she discovers her father is missing. We may get at the bottom of the mystery through her," said Mr. Arden.

When Hiram Jackson thought over what had happened at Beechwood, he came to the conclusion the best thing he could do would be to disappear for a time.

Had he been a man of different temperament he would have told the truth about Hector Norton and his daughter, and probably have been believed.

But he felt his daughter's disgrace keenly, and he would not have published it to the world under any circumstances.

Hiram Jackson knew the country well, and had but little difficulty in securing a hiding-place.

He learned from the papers that a warrant had been issued for his arrest for attempted burglary at Beechwood.

"I'll keep out of the way as long as I can," said Hiram to himself. "I have a few pounds by me that will tide me over the winter, and I have plenty of time to think over what I shall do."

When Amy Jackson read the account of the attempted burglary at Beechwood, she at once connected her father's presence there with herself. Could he have discovered Hector Norton was the man who had betrayed her?

That was hardly possible. She never doubted her father's innocence of the motive attributed to him.

She knew he would never commit burglary, even if in sore straits, and he was in a comfortable situation at the time. Was Hector Norton at the bottom of it all? She knew he wished her father anywhere but in the neighbourhood of Beechwood.

Robert Norton was exceedingly angry, and had given her a week's notice to leave the firm.

She had remonstrated with him, but to no purpose. He told her he would have none of the family in his employ.

"If your father is a thief, there's no trusting the breed," he said brutally.

"My father is no thief, Mr. Norton," said Amy. "You have always found me honest, and have no right to blacken my character."

"It does not want much damaging if all I hear is correct," he said.

Amy Jackson made no answer. She trusted Hector still, and therefore shielded him.

"I am sorry you are going, Amy," said Hector; "but I will take care you do not want for anything."

"I cannot take money for myself," she said, "but I will accept it for the child's sake. He is your son, and ought to be properly cared for."

"I cannot think what your father was such a fool for," said Hector. "Fancy his cheek, saying he came there to see me by appointment."

"Does he suspect anything, Hector?" asked Amy.

"How can he?" replied Hector. "Perhaps you have given him the information."

"You know I have not done so," said Amy. "How can you be so unkind?"

Hector Norton believed her, but he was anxious to discover how Hiram Jackson had found him out.

Despite the vigorous search made by the police, no trace could be found of Hiram Jackson.

"It's my belief, old Arden's got a hand in this," said Mr. Norton. "Jackson is one of his men, and he will shield him to cover his own folly in taking such a man on. I'll see the superintendent about it. He shall hear what I think about the police."

Robert Norton saw the superintendent, who calmly listened to his outburst and accusations.

"Is that all you have to say, Mr. Norton?" asked the superintendent when Robert Norton stopped from sheer lack of breath.

"And quite enough, too. I call it disgraceful. Any decent body of men would have found such a well-known man as Hiram Jackson before this."

"Then let me tell you, sir, although you are a magistrate, that I am not accustomed to be addressed in this manner. Mr. Arden I need not defend. He is too well known in the county for there to be any occasion for me to take up the cudgels on his behalf. Mr. Arden would not

interfere in such a case. He knows the duties attaching to his position as a magistrate."

"Which is as much as to say I do not," fumed Mr. Norton. "I'll report you for your impertinence."

"I leave that to you, Mr. Norton," said the superintendent. "I shall certainly state all that has taken place here to-day, and if necessary inform Mr. Arden of the accusations you have made against him. I should not repeat them, Mr. Norton. You might find yourself in a very unpleasant position. To be indicted for criminal libel is not a desirable thing."

Robert Norton retired beaten, and drove home in a very bad temper. The family at Beechwood avoided him when in this mood, and he sat sulking alone in his study. He tired of his own company, and rang the bell.

"Where's Mr. Hector, Peters?" he asked.

"Out, sir," said Peters.

"You stupid fool, I know he's out," said Mr. Norton. "I asked you where he was."

"Gone to Mr. Caunton's, I believe, sir," said Peters, who had no love for either Hector or Mr. Norton, and moreover liked to stir up strife.

"Caunton's! What Caunton's?" asked Mr. Norton.

"He's Squire Arden's trainer, sir," said Peters.

Robert Norton hated the very mention of *Squire* Arden. He could induce no one to call him Squire Norton, much as he would have relished the appellation.

"Haven't I told you, Peters, not to call Mr. Arden squire in my hearing," he growled.

"Yes, sir," said Peters.

"Then, why don't you obey me?"

"Everybody calls him Squire Arden," said Peters, "and it's difficult to get out of the habit."

"You'll either have to get out of it or leave my service," said Mr. Norton. "You can go. Send Mr. Hector to me the moment he comes in."

Peters chuckled when he had shut the door.

"There'll be a row, that's one comfort. How I does enjoy a shindy when I'm not in it myself," he added, as he felt his head where Hiram Jackson's blow had struck.

"What have you been to Caunton's for?" asked Mr. Norton, when Hector entered the room.

"To hear how those colts of Squire Arden's are going on," said Hector.

"Squire Arden. Hang Squire Arden! I'm sick of hearing the name," said Mr. Norton. "He's no more a squire than I am."

Hector did not care to dispute the point.

"I believe you go after that girl of Caunton's," said his father. "I'll stand none of that nonsense. Once for all, I tell you I won't have it."

"Oh, don't bother yourself, governor," said Hector. "Miss Caunton is a very nice girl, and I'm fond of her society."

"Then the sooner you decide to keep out of her society the better," said Mr. Norton. "I won't have that penniless fellow, Fairfield, running

after Nora, and I won't have you paying attention to Caunton's girl."

Hector Norton saw his father was in one of his bad tempers, so refrained from annoying him, but he meant to do exactly as his inclinations led him with regard to Ruth Caunton.

He failed, however, to read Ruth Caunton's character correctly, or he would have been more careful of his sentiments towards her.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS.

IT was the custom at Arden Hall to hold high festival at Christmas in the good old style.

Christmas weather it most certainly was, and the severe winter still continued.

The sun was shining brightly this Christmas morning, and although it was bitterly cold, there was ample warmth and comfort inside Arden Hall.

The Squire took care every family on his estate should have a good dinner on this particular day.

He left the management of this in his sister's hands, and Eric's mother was never better pleased than when occupied in doing good and trying to make others happy.

It was the custom at Arden Hall for everyone connected with the establishment, whose duties did not detain them within, to go to church on Christmas morning.

Arden Church was an old-fashioned edifice. The tower was covered with ivy, the churchyard shaded with gigantic yew trees. It was a small village

church, the living in the gift of Squire Arden being worth five hundred a year. A nice snug parsonage adjoined the church, and the Rev. Henry Burton was the vicar.

The Rev. Henry Burton was not a great scholar. He could not be termed a clever man, but he was a man with a profound knowledge of human nature, and sympathised with the villagers amongst whom his lot was cast.

He was unmarried, and his housekeeper, Mrs. Barnett, was a woman well adapted for the position she occupied.

It was said in the village, that Mrs. Barnett ruled the vicar with a rod of iron, but the iron was evidently not particularly hot, for it left no visible scars on the person of the Rev. Henry Burton.

The Vicar of Arden was a comfortable-looking man. He was inclined to be stout, and had a fine open countenance, good-nature beaming in it. Like the Squire he was an outspoken man, and even his bishop failed to awe him, and consequently respected him.

The Bishop of the diocese was against the appointment of the Rev. Henry Burton to the Arden living, but the Squire was firm, and would not give way.

Squire Arden had known the vicar for many years, and determined he should be Vicar of Arden when the living became vacant.

After the appointment was made, the Bishop accepted the Rev. Henry Burton with a good grace,



and he confessed that the villagers were admirably suited by the Squire's choice.

The Rev. Henry Burton did not object to hunting. He was often seen out with the hounds when the Squire had a spare horse able to carry his sixteen stone weight. He loved a cricket match, and he rejoiced in a tramp after the partridges.

Robert Norton had been much scandalised when on one occasion he actually saw the Rev. Henry Burton sliding on the village pond with a host of small boys after him.

"Its disgraceful," said Mr. Norton. "Fancy a man like that being Vicar of Arden."

The Rev. Henry Burton cared very little for Mr. Norton's opinion. He despised him as much as it was in his nature to despise anyone, but he was on friendly terms with the ladies at Beechwood.

On Christmas Day the vicar always dined at Arden Hall, and Mrs. Barnett was welcomed there by the housekeeper at Arden.

The bells were pealing merrily in the frosty air as the villagers trooped into the church, which looked bright and cheerful with its decorations of holly and firs and ivy leaves, and sundry flowers from the Arden conservatories.

The Squire liked to see the villagers at church on Christmas morning, and they knew it, and came accordingly.

The Rev. Henry Burton never preached long sermons.

"On Christmas morning there is more peace on earth and goodwill toward men," he said, "when I let my congregation get home to dinner."

What he did say in his sermon, however, was generally to the point, and "the vicar always gives us summat to carry away"—the opinion expressed by one of the oldest inhabitants—was not far from the mark.

"Go to your homes, and enjoy your Christmas dinners," said the vicar, at the conclusion of his sermon, "and do not forget to thank God for all he has done for you."

The dinner at Arden Hall on this particular Christmas Day proved as successful as on former occasions, and the Rev. Henry Burton did ample justice to the good things provided.

"Your appetite is not very good," said Squire Arden, smiling.

"I can assure you I never enjoyed myself more," said the vicar. "You always make me feel I am thinking too much of the pleasures of life when I dine at Arden Hall."

"Capital sermon you gave us," said Eric.

"Because it was brief, I presume," said the vicar.

"That is a good fault," said the Squire. "If parsons practised all they preached some of their sermons would be shorter."

"Always rough on the cloth, Squire," said the vicar.

"Not a bit of it," replied the Squire. "Its broad cloth, you know, and can stand it."

"I saw a nice-looking girl with your gamekeeper in church, Squire. I did not recognise her. Who is she?" asked the vicar.

"I have no idea," replied Mrs. Fairfield. "Probably some relation he has invited for Christmas."

"Fine old port," said the vicar, when dessert was on the table, and Mrs. Fairfield had retired.

"Glad you like it," said the Squire. "It is good enough to risk the gout for."

"I am never troubled with gout," said the vicar. "I hardly recollect being ill. I believe in my infancy I had a variety of complaints—at least, so my good mother informed me."

"The good die young," said the Squire, "but you look pretty tough yet, Henry."

"Thank God, I am," said the vicar. "Good health is the greatest blessing man can receive from his Maker. I do not agree with you that the good die young. You are still alive and hearty."

"But not particularly good," said Squire Arden. "This prolonged frost has caused me to be very wicked at times. No hunting seems probable."

"I wish it would go," said the vicar, with a sigh. "I need exercise, and a gallop after the Rufford always does me good."

"It does not do my horses much good," said the Squire, chaffingly. "That sixteen stone of yours, Henry, is a heavier burden to them than it is to yourself."

"Have mercy, Squire," said the vicar. "You will make me ashamed to look at one of your horses again."

"I have noticed you ride light," said Eric.

"A compliment," said the vicar. "I am gratified. This wine is remarkably good. Thanks, one more glass."

"You ought to mortify the flesh, Henry," said the Squire.

"I hope I do not indulge," said the vicar. "But I relish the gifts Providence sends me."

"You ought to practise self denial," said the Squire.

"I will. I decline to have any more of your old port, Squire," said the vicar.

"Because you want a nap. Time him, Eric. The Church will slumber for exactly twenty minutes," said the Squire.

"No more," asked the vicar.

"Not a minute beyond the twenty," said the Squire.

"Then I must make the most of the twenty," said the vicar, as he settled himself comfortably in the armchair.

Squire Arden appreciated an after-dinner nap, and when Eric saw both the vicar and the Squire were keeping each other company in the land of dreams, he went quietly out of the room.

He found his mother chatting with Mrs. Barnett, and said:

"I have left the vicar and uncle slumbering peacefully."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Barnett, "has Mr. Burton actually gone to sleep?"

"No doubt about it," said Eric.

"I am afraid the vicar indulges when he dines with Squire Arden," said Mrs. Barnett. "Your uncle is so hospitable, Mr. Eric."

"The vicar is perfectly happy," said Eric. "I am sure he is very abstemious, he cannot have had more than a bottle of port."

The vicar had limited himself to three glasses, but Eric knew Mrs. Barnett, and liked to tease her.

"A bottle, did you say, Mr. Eric?" said Mrs. Barnett, horrified; "it is shocking. He will be ill, I am sure he will."

"You ought to warn him against uncle's old port," said Eric, "It is gouty, extremely gouty."

"Eric, do not alarm Mrs. Barnett," said his mother; "you are exaggerating."

"A bottle I assure you, Mrs. Barnett," said Eric. "You must administer an antidote when he reaches the vicarage."

"I will, Mr. Eric. I hope it will be a warning to him. A whole bottle. I am surprised," said Mrs. Barnett.

"And I fancy the Rev. Henry will be surprised when Mrs. Barnett mentions the fact," said Eric, laughing, as he went out of the room.

Bob Stubbins also had a visitor for Christmas.

He had written to Amy Jackson, and asked her to spend a few days with them. He thought she would be anxious about her father, and it would be a change for her.

Amy Jackson accepted the invitation without hesitation. It was the very thing she desired—change of air and a visit to Arden.

She was a good-looking girl, and her neat dress and pretty face had attracted some notice in Arden church on Christmas morning.

Naturally she talked a great deal about her father's disappearance, and she refused to believe he had been guilty of burglary.

"I will never believe he went to Beechwood to rob," said Amy. "I know him too well for that."

"And so do I, my lass," replied Bob Stubbins. "He must have had a reason for going there, and I should like to find out what it is."

Amy Jackson saw Ruth Caunton at church for the first time, and she saw with a jealous pang how attractive and ladylike she was.

"They do say as how young Hector Norton sticks up to her," said Bob Stubbins, "but I reckon his father won't stand it."

"She looks a very nice young lady," said Amy Jackson.

"So she is, my dear," replied Mrs. Stubbins. "A very nice young woman indeed. Quite the equal of the likes of Hector Norton."

"They are not engaged, are they?" asked Amy.

"Not yet, that I know on," said Bob. "But, from their carryings-on, I fancy they will be afore long."

Hector Norton was not at church on Christmas morning, and consequently did not know of Amy Jackson's visit to Arden.

Ned Caunton's cottage was easily seen from the gamekeeper's house, and Amy Jackson turned pale and clenched her hands as she saw Hector Norton ride up to the gate, dismount, and enter the trainer's house.

He remained there fully an hour, and Amy Jackson was in a state of feverish excitement during that time.

Then she saw him come out of the house, linger in the porch with Ruth Caunton, over whom he was bending in a lover-like and affectionate manner.

"I cannot stand this, indeed I cannot," said Amy Jackson to herself. "I will see Ruth Caunton and find out the truth. If Hector is playing us both false, I will tell her all."

It was a difficult task Amy had undertaken, but she determined to go through with it.

She called at the trainer's cottage, and asked to see Miss Caunton.

Ruth, with her kindly disposition sympathised with her on the loss of her father. She had heard Hector Norton's version of the affair at Beechwood, and did not doubt the construction he put upon it.

"I am very sorry for you," said Ruth. "I heard all about it from Mr. Norton."

"Mr. Hector Norton?" asked Amy. "Does he visit here?"

"Yes," said Ruth, surprised at the girl's manner. "Do you know him?"

"Very well," said Amy. "I was employed by the firm at Nottingham, but Mr. Norton, senior, dismissed me after my father's visit to Beechwood."

"That was unjust," said Ruth. "You were not to blame for the fault your father committed."

"I do not believe he committed any fault," said Amy. "I believe he went there by invitation of Hector Norton."

"Surely that is improbable," said Ruth.

"Miss Caunton," said Amy. "What is Hector Norton to you?"

The suddenness of the question, as also its nature, startled Ruth.

"I do not think you have any right to ask me such a question," she said.

"Believe me, I have a right, Miss Caunton," said Amy. "When you hear my story you will agree with me."

"And what story have you to tell me that concerns Hector Norton?" asked Ruth.

"I hope you will not think me rude or inquisitive if I ask if you are engaged to him," said Amy.

Ruth Caunton hesitated a few moments. Then she replied:

"Your question is a strange one, but I believe you must have some good reason for asking it."

"I have, Miss Caunton," said Amy. "The best of reasons."



"Mr. Norton has asked me to be his wife," said Ruth. Amy Jackson started, and put her hand to her side as if in pain. "But I have not given him an answer yet," added Ruth.

"Do you love him?" asked Amy, eagerly.

"Really you are a strange girl," said Ruth, becoming impatient. "I am afraid I must decline to answer that question."

"Will you listen to my story. It is a painful one," said Amy, "but when you have heard it I am sure you will acknowledge I was right to come here."

Ruth Cauntton listened to the tale of Hector Norton's perfidy from the lips of the girl he had betrayed.

When Amy Jackson finished, and bowed her head in shame, the hot tears coursing down her cheeks, Ruth Cauntton put her arm round her, and drew her towards her.

She soothed her, and sympathised with her.

Ruth was indignant with Hector Norton for his treatment of Amy Jackson, and for his insult towards herself—for such she now considered his proposal.

"Promise me you will not tell him you have heard this story from me," said Amy.

"I promise you," replied Ruth, "but he shall know what my opinion of him is. I think when he receives my answer to his proposal he will be surprised."

Amy Jackson returned to the keeper's house much relieved.

She felt Ruth Caunton was no longer her rival but her friend. She meant to force Hector Norton to keep his promise to her, and marry her, even if he left her immediately afterwards, and declined to live with her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE MERRY MONTH OF JUNE.

IT was six months since Hiram Jackson disappeared from Arden Hall, and nothing had been seen or heard of him.

Ruth Cauntton declined Hector Norton's proposal when he renewed it, and treated him in a very abrupt manner. She did not mention Amy Jackson's story; but Hector imagined she must have heard about it. He knew Amy Jackson had been to Arden, and consequently fancied she and Ruth must have met.

He had been very angry with Amy, and had totally neglected her of late, but she bore up bravely and hoped for the best.

She obtained another situation, and if she could have heard news of her father she would have been comparatively happy. Arden Hall was once more nestling amidst the trees in full leaf, and the country was looking its brightest and best in this merry month of June.

Training operations had been in full swing for some months, and Ned Cauntton was enthusiastic about the progress made by Cannon Ball and Primrose.

The colts had stood the severe winter splendidly, and although not forward enough to run in the Derby, were in just the condition to make a good show in the autumn.

Eric Fairfield was in London for the Derby week, and he enjoyed the change, although he was always glad to leave the crowded streets of the vast city for the quiet of the green lanes and fields of Arden.

City life had not much attraction for Eric. He always felt rather depressed when in London, for in the midst of all the luxury he saw sights and scenes which denoted the misery and vice existing there.

Eric often strolled about the streets late at night, not on pleasure bent, but learning lessons from all he saw. He did not believe in shutting his eyes to the darker side of London life. He had been through some of the rookeries with a well-known detective, and was appalled at the destitution and misery he saw.

Something seemed to tell Eric he should meet with Hiram Jackson in London. He was strangely interested in the man's fate. Eric had just as much feeling for Hiram Jackson in his trouble as he would have had if the gamekeeper had been in his own station in life.

One night Eric had been to the Haymarket Theatre. He came across Trafalgar Square, and was walking down the Strand towards his hotel in Norfolk Street, when someone came up behind and touched him on the shoulder.

At the same moment a policeman said:

"None of that, now. Move on and leave the gentlemen alone, or I'll lock you up for the night. There's such a lot of these fellows about, sir," he said to Eric. "We have to keep a sharp eye on them."

Eric looked hard at the man, and although much changed, he recognised Hiram Jackson.

"I know the man," he said to the policeman, "He was formerly employed by me."

"Oh, very well, sir," said the policeman, "that makes a difference. The man's a stranger to me. He's not one of the regulars."

"Hiram, what on earth are you doing in London?" said Eric.

"Pretty near starving, sir," said Hiram. "I managed to pull through the winter all right in Nottinghamshire. In the spring I tramped here, making my way on the road, and I have been out of work for three months, or nearly so."

"But why did you go away from Arden? It made matters look worse against you. Walk down the street with me, and tell me about it," said Eric.

Hiram Jackson was poorly clad, but looked clean, and his walking with Eric did not attract attention.

"You didn't believe I tried to commit burglary at Beechwood, did you, sir?" asked Hiram.

"No," said Eric. "I did not. The Squire did not believe it, and Bob Stubbins did not believe it."

"I'm glad of that, sir," said Hiram. "I went there to see Hector Norton. I cannot tell you why I went, but I was there by appointment with him. He told me how to reach his father's study, and said he would slip out when dinner was nearly over and see me. It was all a trap, sir, a dastardly, cowardly trick to get me out of the neighbourhood. Hector Norton accused me of breaking into the house. I saw I was trapped and had no time to think. I bolted through the window and cleared out. That's the truth, sir."

"Then Hector Norton behaved to you like a scoundrel. Cannot you clear yourself, Hiram. You must be able to do so?" said Eric.

"I could clear myself, sir, but it would be at the expense of someone very dear to me, and I am not going to do it, sir. I must bide my time, but a day of reckoning will come when I meet Hector Norton," said Hiram, savagely.

"There must be no violence, Hiram," said Eric. "That will not mend matters. You must let me know where I can write to you. Here are a couple of sovereigns. I will let my uncle know I have seen you, and I am sure he will allow you something when he hears your story. I wish you would come back to Arden, Hiram, and face it. Think of what your daughter must suffer, not knowing where you are and not hearing from you since you went away."

"Poor lass," said Hiram, "will you tell her you have seen me?"

"If I meet her I will," said Eric. "I will tell Stubbins, and he will let her know."

"Bless you for your kindness, sir," said Hiram. I would rather you did not write to me. If I have anything to say, I will send you a note."

Eric left Hiram, who promised to communicate with him if necessary.

Next day was Derby Day, and Eric drove down to Epsom with a party of friends.

The Derby was won by an outsider, strange to say, and Eric had a trifle on the favourite, who ran second.

He saw nothing in the race he fancied as much as Cannon Ball. The winner, Simonsen, he thought lucky to beat the favourite, Nobleman, a much better horse to look at, and showing a lot more quality.

Eric met many friends in the paddock, most of them he had not seen since the hunting season.

"I hear your uncle has a likely colt or two at Arden," said Richard Potter, the trainer of Nobleman, "and old Ned Caunton is handling them."

"We have a couple of fairly good ones," said Eric, "I think equal to most of the lot that ran in the Derby."

"Nobleman ought to have won, I think," said the trainer. "Anyhow, he must have a great chance in the Eclipse Stakes."

"Then you are not going to save him for the St. Leger?" said Eric.

"I shall have a cut at the Eclipse first. Ten thousand pounds is not picked up, every day, sir."

"It is not," said Eric. "We shall run one of ours in that race, I think. At least, such is my uncle's intention at present."

"Then we shall see if you can beat Nobleman," said the trainer, with a smile.

"You fancy we have no chance, I see," said Eric. "I think our colt, although trained in private, will astonish some of you Newmarket gentlemen when you see him gallop."

"I for one shall be glad to see Squire Arden's colours again," said Potter. "The old magpie jacket was carried to victory on many a good horse in days gone by."

"Hallo, Eric, I heard you were in town for Derby week. I could only induce the governor to let me away yesterday afternoon, or I should have been here a week ago."

The speaker was Hector Norton, and Eric had not met him since his talk with Hiram Jackson.

"I hope you were lucky enough to back the winner," said Eric, stiffly, in want of something better to say.

Hector Norton noticed his coldness, and thought—"I'm hanged if I'm not getting the cold shoulder on all sides. I wonder what is up with him."

"No, I backed Nobleman," said Hector. "Suppose you did the same. I am afraid your defeat has not improved your temper, Eric. You look a bit hipped. What's the matter, man? Come and have a glass of champagne."

"No, thank you," said Eric. "I am not hipped, as you call it, and as for my losses, they never



trouble me much, I seldom have more than a five-pound note on."

"Wish I didn't," said Hector. "I'm in a bit of a mess, Eric. I've been going the pace lately, since Ruth Caunton said No to me I've been upset. I owe a heap of money, and I'm afraid the governor will not fork out."

"Gambling will not help you to forget your disappointment," said Eric.

"Must do something," said Hector Norton. "If Ruth had accepted me I should have been a different man. I must have a plunge on something, Eric. I'll watch that fellow, Nobleman. He ought to win before long. I hope your colts won't meet him, he's a cut above them, I think."

"Perhaps he is," said Eric. "That, however, remains to be seen."

"I saw you talking to Potter," said Hector. "What does he think about Nobleman?"

"Fancies he has a good chance for the Eclipse Stakes," said Eric. "That is all I can tell you. Excuse me, please, I must join my friends."

"I say, Eric," said Hector Norton. "You needn't be so deuced off-hand. Have I done anything to offend you? If so, out with it."

"You have not offended me," said Eric. "But I have heard something that does not redound to your credit."

"Indeed," said Hector, sneeringly. "Pray what is it?"

"I have heard you invited our keeper, Hiram Jackson, to meet you at Beechwood, and then accused

him of breaking into the house. You did this, I hear, in order to drive Jackson from Arden. Why, I do not know. That you acted as I have stated I firmly believe, and it does not redound to your credit. I am sorry to have to speak to you in this strain, Hector, because I love your sister very dearly, and hope to make her my wife," said Eric.

"So that's how the land lies," said Hector. "I deny what you say, Eric. You have been deceived. Have you seen Hiram Jackson?"

"I have," said Eric.

"If he told you I invited him to Beechwood to meet me, he told you a lie," said Hector.

Eric remained silent.

"Don't you believe *me*?" said Hector.

"Jackson assured me his story was true," said Eric.

"And you prefer to believe a rascally poaching vagabond to me?" said Hector Norton, hotly. "I am much obliged for your good opinion."

"I do not wish to quarrel with you, Hector," said Eric. "You have done Hiram Jackson a grievous wrong. Make what amends you can by clearing him. It is not too late even now."

For a moment Hector Norton's better nature asserted itself, but he crushed the feeling down, and said:

"I am sorry you doubt me, Eric. We have been good friends. I trust you will find out you have wronged me," said Hector Norton. "Where is Hiram Jackson?"

"That I cannot tell you," said Eric.

"But there is a warrant out against him," said Hector. "It is your duty to give all the information you can to the police."

"It is not my duty to give information against an innocent man," said Eric.

"He is not innocent," said Hector, angrily.

"That is a matter of opinion. I choose to believe him innocent until he is proved guilty," said Eric.

"He would quickly be proved guilty if the police put their hands on him," said Hector.

Someone spoke to Eric, and Hector Norton walked away.

"Do you know Mr. Norton well?" asked a well-known commissioner, who was acquainted with Eric.

"Yes, Dick," said Eric. "His father is a neighbour of my uncle's at Arden."

"I'm afraid he's in with a bad set," said Dick Banks. "I thought you might give him a hint."

"He would not accept a hint from me," said Eric. "We are not on the best of terms at present."

"I'm sorry for that," said Dick Banks. "He's a smart young chap, and he's sure to get into a mess with the crowd he is in with. He owes a heap of money now, and he'll have to settle, or there will be a shindy over it."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Eric. "I'll do what I can for him. It is very good of you to speak about it, Dick."

"Not at all. I hate to see a fellow let in by a gang of sharks. You see that chap he's talking to now, he's an out and out bad lot," said Dick Banks.

"By the way, Mr. Fairfield, what about the Arden colts. Anything in my line?"

"My uncle does not bet much," said Eric, "but I have no doubt there will be a small commission before long. You will, of course, do the business for him."

"I shall be only too pleased. I worked Squire Arden's commission when his horse ran second in the Derby. He won that race if ever a man did. I was wild about it. Lost a pot of money myself over it," said Banks. "I'd give a trifle to see the magpie jacket in front again."

"Then I think you may rest satisfied you will see it in front before long. The colts are doing well. You will hear all in good time what we intend doing," said Eric.

Hector Norton had got into a bad set, and Dick Banks was not far out in his estimation of Hector's companions.

Since Ruth Caunton rejected his addresses, Hector Norton had plunged into a whirl of dissipation. He led a fast life in Nottingham, and attended race meetings, and bet heavily whenever he had the opportunity. He also gambled at cards, played billiards and pool, drank more champagne than was good for him, and spent money in a reckless manner. When he ran short of ready money he borrowed, and the interest he paid was heavy.

Hector Norton's conscience troubled him at times, and he tried to drown its voice in a round of gaiety and excess.

He knew he had behaved in a scandalous manner over the Beechwood burglary affair, and his meeting with Eric Fairfield at Epsom had not improved his temper.

He lost a large sum on Nobleman, and he plunged to make a recovery, with the usual result that he only went deeper into the mire.

He left off after the last race a heavy loser on the day, and returned to London in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

## CHAPTER XV.

## AN ARRANGEMENT.

HECTOR NORTON had not overstated his case to Eric Fairfield when he said he was in difficulties, and that "the governor would not fork out."

Mr. Norton senior had firmly declined to pay Hector's gambling debts.

"They are not legal debts," said Mr. Norton. "You will not get into trouble over them, and I decline to pay money lost in gambling on horses. You must get out of the difficulty the best way you can."

And Hector tried to mend matters by betting still more recklessly. He lost heavily over the Derby week, and remained in London longer than there was any necessity for him to do so.

He managed to enter into an amicable arrangement with his creditors, who agreed to give him time. One man, Sirius Cohen, to whom Hector owed about five hundred pounds, was obstinate, and told Hector plainly he must have his money in a month.

"Can't be done, Sirius," said Hector. "You'll have to wait as the others have arranged to do."

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"I have waited, Mr. Norton," said Sirus. "You promised to let me have a couple of hundred to settle with over the Derby. I had a bad book on that race. I laid the full amount against the winner, and lost over Nobleman for a place."

"Sorry to hear it Sirus, but I can't help you. I'll tell you what I will do, and it may be of some use to you."

"What have you got on now?" asked Sirus.

"You have heard of Squire Arden, of Arden Hall?" asked Hector.

"Oh, yes. He raced a good deal in former times. What about him?" asked Sirus.

"They have a couple of colts in training there, real good ones. I have seen them," said Hector.

"Well," said Sirus.

"Ned Cauntton trains them, and he fancies one of them will win the St. Leger. Mr. Arden has made up his mind to have a cert for that race. Cauntton tells me Primrose is the better of the pair. You could get forty to one about Primrose for the Leger now."

"Much good that would do me if the horse did not come into the market," said Sirus.

"But he will come into the market. Listen to me, Sirus. We live on the next estate to Arden Hall, and I hear all that goes on there. If you will deal fairly by me over that amount I owe you, I will give you all the information I can about Squire Arden's horses," said Hector.

"These colts may be only moderates," said Sirus. "Are you quite sure Ned Cauntton has a good opinion of them?"

"Certain," said Hector. "He told me so himself."

"Would he tell you the truth?" asked Sirus.

"Yes," replied Hector. "I am engaged to his daughter, and he would not tell me anything wrong."

"Oh, that's different," said Sirus. "Strange to say, I've heard a whisper about these colts myself. I heard the Squire, as you call him, was trying to engage a crack jockey to ride for him. Cannon Ball was the name of the colt, I believe!"

"That is one of them," said Hector, "but Primrose is the better of the pair."

"I don't want to be hard on you, Mr. Norton," said Sirus, "and if you can give me any information about these Arden colts I will not press you for the money."

"I will give you all the information I can," said Hector. "If there is a real good thing on, I should like to stand in with you for a trifle."

"And work off your debts that way," said Sirus. "Cool, is it not?"

"I must get a win somehow," said Hector, "I'm regularly stumped."

It was not a very neighbourly action, on the part of Hector Norton, to offer to supply a man like Sirus Cohen with information about Squire Arden's horses.

Sirus Cohen would not have thought Hector Norton's information worth much, had he not known Ned Caunton was an exceedingly clever trainer, and that inquiries had been made about a



good jockey to ride Mr. Arden's colt in the St. Leger.

The sporting papers had made public the news that there were a couple of promising colts being trained in private at Arden Hall by Ned Caunton, and that the better of the pair was considered by the trainer to have a good outside chance in the St. Leger.

Ned Caunton's judgment was considered good enough to be worthy of notice, as in years gone by the trainer had been a very well-known man. It was seldom a Leger candidate was trained in private, and this, combined with numerous rumours and the fashionable breeding of the colts, was enough to cause inquiries to be made about them.

Hector Norton put little faith in the merits of the Arden colts, and he was prejudiced against them. Still this did not prevent his giving Sirus Cohen a glowing account of them to serve his own ends.

He meant to have a dash on Nobleman for the Eclipse Stakes, provided all went well with the horse.

When he returned to Beechwood, Hector Norton found his father in anything but an enviable frame of mind. Truth to tell, the firm of Norton and Son had not prospered so well of late, and several of Robert Norton's speculations, to make matters worse, had turned out badly.

Hector Norton troubled himself very little about the finances of Norton and Son. He drew a certain income out of the business and left the

financing to his father. He had no idea the firm was in low water, yet such was the case.

Robert Norton had spent a large sum of money on Beechwood, and he had also lived in an ostentatious manner, in order to gain a position in the county.

Although the business of Norton and Son was still a profitable one, it could not stand the constant drain.

Robert Norton had no wish for his affairs to be made public, but he thought it might influence his son and cause him to be less extravagant if he gave him to understand the business was not so good as in former days.

Robert Norton made the mistake of only telling Hector part of the truth, and this he related in such a lame fashion, that Hector fancied it was merely an effort on his father's part to alarm him and thus check his expenditure. Mrs. Norton and the girls were in total ignorance of any change, and they regarded Norton and Son as one of the wealthiest firms in Nottingham.

It was lucky for Robert Norton his wife was an economical woman, and she kept down the household expenses wonderfully, and yet there was no lack of anything.

The Misses Norton dressed well, and rode and drove good horses, and the county people generally regarded them as the daughters of a rich, self-made man.

Robert Norton had faced difficulties before, and he could face them again.

His insatiable ambition to become a county magnate, however, caused him to overrun his discretion.

He did not mean to economise and give up Beechwood. He determined instead to launch out in his business and endeavour to retrieve his losses in speculations.

Of all this his family were kept entirely in the dark, and Robert Norton's reduced fortune was a matter known only to himself.

It was known in business circles that he had met with heavy reverses, but the general opinion was that he was well able to stand them.

Eric Fairfield was the last person who might have been expected to hear of Robert Norton's heavy losses, and yet he did hear.

He had, however, no idea of the extent of those losses, and if Robert Norton had been utterly ruined, it would have made no difference in his feelings towards Nora.

Robert Norton's opposition to Nora's engagement to Eric had gradually ceased.

"She's the youngest," he thought, "and I might as well let him have her. He'll be a bit surprised I fancy when I decline to settle an income upon her."

Consequently he had given an ungracious assent to Nora's engagement, and with that she had to remain content.

Nora soon discovered something was wrong between her brother and Eric. She loved Hector, and it pained her to see the estrangement between them.

She questioned Hector, but he gave her no satisfaction.

He merely said he was unaware that Eric bore him any ill-feeling; he certainly had none towards him.

Eric was more truthful, and frankly confessed Hector had done something of which he (Eric) could not approve.

"What that something is, Nora, you must pardon me for not saying."

"I am sure there is some mistake, Eric," said Nora. "Hector would never be guilty of any dishonourable act."

"I honour you for your loyalty to your brother," said Eric, "but I regret to say, Nora, I cannot hold the good opinion I formerly had of him."

Ruth Caunton and Nora Norton were great friends, and Nora confided in her, and related how pained she felt at the disagreement between her brother and Eric.

Ruth gathered from this that Eric had learnt the facts about Hector's connection with Amy Jackson, and she did not wonder at his honest nature rebelling against Hector Norton's conduct.

She sided with Eric, and Nora Norton became painfully aware that the feeling at Arden was all against her brother.

"I cannot think how it is Hector has made so many enemies," she said to Ruth.

"Perhaps if your brother enlightened you as to his conduct you would agree with me he is not all you have pictured him," said Ruth.

"But surely you can tell me what has turned you against him," said Nora. "I fancied at one time I should have you for a sister, Ruth."

"Had your brother's conduct been different such might have been the case," said Ruth; "but I could never regard him with the same feelings again. I am sorry to pain you, Nora; but it need not make any difference in our friendship, and I trust it will not."

"Hector, I am sure you have done something both Ruth Caunton and Eric think exceedingly wrong," said Nora to him the evening after she had seen Ruth.

"I wish you would not continually harp on this subject," said Hector. "If you cannot trust me, Nora, I can only say you had better side with the opposition. As regards Ruth Caunton, I do not think she treated me fairly. She gave me every encouragement, and when I asked her to be my wife she certainly gave me the impression I should receive a favourable answer. Why she jilted me I do not know. Perhaps Mr. Fairfield influenced her; I believe his opinion carries great weight in that quarter. If I were in your position I should not be perfectly satisfied with the very excellent terms Ruth and Eric are upon with each other."

"I can trust Eric," said Nora. "He and Ruth, you are well aware, are very old friends. If you try to make mischief between us, it will not be worthy of you, Hector."

"I'm not trying to make mischief," said Hector. "I merely remarked that Ruth and Eric were

very good friends. From what I see he is as partial to her society as yours."

"You are very unkind," said Nora. She thought over her brother's words, and a feeling of uneasiness came over her.

She loved Eric dearly, and the thought of any other woman coming between them troubled her. It had never occurred to her that Eric might be untrue to her, and she did not believe he would be. Nevertheless she could not help thinking over Hector's words.

When Ruth Caunton finally declined Hector Norton's proposal, the Rev. Henry Burton felt a strange feeling of satisfaction. He admired Ruth immensely, and although considerably older he was by no means beyond a marriageable age.

The Vicar of Arden had always been regarded as a confirmed bachelor, and it would have surprised everyone who knew him if they heard he contemplated matrimony.

No one would have been more surprised than Squire Arden and the vicar's housekeeper.

The Rev. Henry Burton thought it was his dislike of Hector Norton's character made him regret there was a prospect of an engagement between Ruth and young Norton.

When he knew there was not likely to be an engagement he realised that he had been wrong, and that regard for Ruth herself had caused the antagonistic feeling to the prospect of her becoming Mrs. Norton.

The vicar knew it would not be considered the proper thing for a man occupying the position he did to marry the daughter of Squire Arden's trainer.

He smiled to himself as he pictured the righteous indignation of his Bishop when he heard of such an engagement.

The Rev. Henry was not a conceited man, and he very much doubted if Ruth Cauntton would give a proposal from himself a more favourable answer than Hector Norton had received.

Ned Cauntton remarked how wonderfully interested "the parson" was in the Squire's colts, and how frequently he called at Ivy Cottage to inquire after their prospects.

"I believe the parson means having a wager on Cannon Ball for the Leger," he said to Ruth. "He's mightily interested in that colt's welfare."

"Mr. Burton naturally wishes the Squire to succeed in winning the Leger, on which he has set his heart," said Ruth. "Mr. Burton is different from most clergymen. There is very little nonsense about him, father."

"You are a great admirer of his," said Ned.

"I certainly do admire him," said Ruth. "He is one of the most manly men I know. He is a good man, too, and we could not have a better Vicar of Arden."

"There I agree with you," said Ned. "Why a parson should not like horses I don't know. I remember Parson King winning the Leger with Apology. I'm blest if I don't think Parson Burton would rejoice to win a Leger himself."

"I think he would prefer to see the Squire win it," said Ruth.

"It's my belief," said Ned to himself, "that Mr. Henry Burton is smitten with my Ruth. "He's a good bit older than she is. Fancy my daughter being the wife of the Vicar of Arden."

The mere thought of such a possibility, made Ned Cauntton laugh heartily.

"She'd make him an excellent wife, all the same," said Ned, "but whatever would Mrs. Barnett say? Oh, lor! I fancy I see her face when she receives the announcement. The parson would never have the courage to tell her. He'd have to do it by deputy. I wonder what the odds are against the double, Cannon Ball for the Leger and my lass for the parson's matrimonial stakes?"



## CHAPTER XVI.

## AT SANDOWN PARK.

SQUIRE ARDEN did not often venture up to London, but he meant seeing Primrose run for the Eclipse Stakes.

A trial at Arden resulted in Primrose beating Cannon Ball and Honeydrop, and Ned Caunton reluctantly decided to run Primrose for the Eclipse Stakes instead of Cannon Ball.

"Can't make it out, Mr. Eric," said Ned, "I'm sure Cannon Ball is the better colt. He's not quite wound up I expect, but he'll be our horse for the St. Leger, mark my words."

"Have another trial," suggested Eric. "It won't do to throw away such a chance as an Eclipse Stakes of ten thousand pounds."

"I'd much rather let it stand as it is," said Ned Caunton. "Another trial might take the racing out of Primrose. He can't stand as much as Cannon Ball. That is one reason I prefer Cannon Ball for the St. Leger. I shall be able to give him a lot of work."

"Do as you think best," said Eric. "The Squire leaves it entirely to you."

Hector Norton heard Primrose won the trial, and wrote to Sirius Cohen accordingly, urging that worthy to get on to Primrose for the St. Leger at once, as if he won the Eclipse Stakes he would come to very short odds.

Sirius Cohen, when he received Hector's letter, took a few hundreds at forty to one about Primrose for the Leger, and when the Eclipse betting opened, backed the colt to win him five hundred.

"If he wins the Eclipse Stakes, it is good enough to put the money on him for the Leger," thought Sirius.

Squire Arden was somewhat surprised when he saw in the betting quotations in the morning paper that Primrose had been backed for the Eclipse Stakes.

"Who the deuce can have backed him," said the Squire. "No one knew about the trial."

"I told Hector Norton if he wanted to bet on the Eclipse, Primrose had a chance. He asked me for the information, and, although we are not very good friends, I hardly liked to refuse him," said Eric.

"Then you may depend upon it he has backed the colt. Not that it matters much," said Squire Arden, "the stake will be quite enough for me. If Primrose wins, I can afford to stand a large stake for the Leger."

Sandown Park is an attractive racecourse.

Squire Arden although he loved the old-fashioned courses had to confess Sandown was a vast improvement upon them in many respects.

He journeyed to Sandown by train, from Waterloo to Esher with Eric, preferring this to driving, although more than one member of the club would have been proud to have Squire Arden on the box seat of his coach.

"By Jove, Eric, this is something like a course," said the Squire, who had not seen Sandown Park before, as he looked out of the carriage window as the train drew up at Esher.

"Yes, it's a fine place," said Eric, "but wait until you are on the stand that will give you a better idea of the beauties of the scenery."

Sandown Park is situated in the midst of sylvan scenery, and the view from the stand, is over an extensive country, splendidly wooded and forming a charming landscape.

"It is charming," said Squire Arden, as he surveyed the scene from the lawn. "Well laid out, too. Which is the Eclipse Course, Eric?"

"Look to your left," said Eric. "They start against those trees, then race round by the cottage, along the railway side, round that far bend on the right, and then finish up the straight, opposite the club enclosure. The track lower down is for the five-furlong straight races. You cannot see the finish so well from here."

"Just a mile and a quarter, the Eclipse," said the Squire.

"About a mile and a quarter," said Eric. "They ought to go at top pace most of the way."

"Finish on a slight rise," said the Squire. "That will try their mettle."

"Yes," I'm glad we secured Findon to ride. He's one of the best of our northern jockeys, and I always like to see them given a chance against the southern men."

"Findon has a good reputation," said the Squire, "and Ned Caunton says we could not have secured a better man. He is very anxious for me to engage him to ride in the St. Leger."

"I should certainly do so, uncle," said Eric.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Sir William Singleton, master of the Rufford Hounds, as he held out his hand to Squire Arden. "I knew you had a colt engaged in the big event, but I did not anticipate seeing you here."

"There's a bit of life left in me yet, Sir William," said the Squire. "It is the first time I have been at Sandown Park."

"What do you think of it?" asked Sir William.

"It is splendid. I honestly confess it has surprised me. Racing and racecourses have changed vastly since I was running horses," said the Squire.

"Alterations for the better," said Sir William.

"The Duke of Ollerton is present, I see," said the Squire. "I know his Grace is fond of a good horse. He ought to look over Primrose in the paddock. I should like his opinion of the colt."

"I am sure he will be very pleased to see you here," said Sir William. "His Grace has no greater respect for any man in our county."

"We will go and have a peep at Primrose," said the Squire. "You can mention the matter to his Grace."

"Most certainly," said Sir William.

"The Duke is a good judge, Eric," said the Squire. "He has one of the best studs in England as you know. I should like his opinion of Primrose before the race."

Squire Arden was recognised by many people as he made his way with Eric to the paddock.

He had been a familiar figure in days gone by on the racecourse, and racing men have wonderful good memories for faces.

"I hope your colt will win, Mr. Arden," said a well-known bookmaker.

"Thank you, Dick," laughed the Squire. "I guess from that you have a good book if he gets home."

"I have," said the bookmaker. "Not laid more than five hundred against yours."

"That's Squire Arden, owner of Primrose," said a fine-looking man to the well-dressed lady by his side.

"What a splendid old gentleman," said the lady, as she glanced at the still erect and stalwart figure of the Squire.

Many people turned to look at Squire Arden and his nephew, as they went towards the paddock. They were men likely to attract attention. There was that indefinable something in their bearing which denoted they were gentlemen.

"How fond of the old gentleman that good-looking young man is," said a charming girl to her escort."

"Good-looking. Don't see much in his looks to admire," said her companion.

"Then you are a bad judge. He is a handsome man, and so is his father—if it is his father," she answered.

Eric was not unlike his uncle, and they might well have been taken for father and son.

Not aware that they attracted any particular attention, Squire Arden and Eric walked across the paddock, to Primrose's box, which was at the far side.

Ned Caunton and a couple of lads from Arden had come over with Primrose, so the colt was well looked after.

"How is he, Ned?" asked the Squire.

"Couldn't be better, Squire," replied the trainer. "He's as quiet as a lamb, and has settled down comfortably. The journey has done him no harm. Bring him out, Toby; a walk round won't hurt him, and he takes no notice of crowds."

The lad addressed as Toby brought Primrose out, and as he did so Sir William Singleton and the Duke of Ollerton came up.

"Very pleased to see you at Sandown, Squire Arden," said the Duke, shaking him heartily by the hand. "You do not often come so far south."

"No, your Grace," said the Squire. "My nephew induced me to come. He is confident

about Primrose winning, and said I must be there to see the colours first past the post. This is my nephew, your Grace."

"We have met before," said the Duke, smiling as he shook Eric by the hand. "Not many followers of the Rufford are unacquainted with him. He rides well to hounds."

"Your Grace is very kind to say so," replied Eric. "I like to ride straight when I have a good horse under me."

"Nothing like it," said the Duke. "Ride straight and keep straight is a good motto."

"What a fine colt!" he said, as he looked at Primrose. "One of your own breeding, Squire?"

"Yes, your Grace. His dam is one of the best mares I ever owned," said the Squire.

"Indeed," said the Duke; "where did you get her from?"

"I bought her as a yearling at one of your Grace's sales," said the Squire.

The Duke looked with additional interest at Primrose.

"Walk him round," said Ned to the lad.

Primrose moved freely, and had a hard, thoroughly fit look about him that pleased the Duke.

"He reflects credit on his trainer," said the Duke.

"No doubt about it," remarked Sir William. "I thought your Grace would be pleased with the colt."

"I hope he will win you the race," said the Duke. "I wish you luck with him, Squire. I shall certainly have a trifle on him."

"I'm glad he likes Primrose," said the Squire. "He is not the man merely to express an opinion to please me. He means it, Eric. I'm feeling quite excited. It is like old times. Eric, my lad, I've a notion we shall about win this race."

"I am confident myself," said Eric, "and so is Ned."

"We have a good chance from what I have seen of the other horses in the paddock," said Ned. "Nobleman is the best I should say. He looks very fit, and may prove bad to beat."

"On his Derby form he has a chance," said Eric. "I saw him when second to Simonsen, and as I told you, Ned, I think he ought to have won. He is favourite for this race, I believe."

"There's Hector Norton," said the Squire. "Who is that fellow with him?"

"Looks like a money-lender," said Eric.

"What do you know about money-lenders?" asked the Squire.

"Very little, I am glad to say," replied Eric with a laugh.

Hector Norton's companion was Sirius Cohen, and they were on the look out for Primrose.

"There's the colt," said Hector. "Got a chance no doubt, but I fancy Nobleman."

"Then what made you tell me to back Primrose for the Leger?" asked Cohen.



"Because you will have excellent hedging money even if Primrose only runs into a place," said Hector.

"I like the cut of the colt," said Cohen. "He's a better shaped 'un than Nobleman."

"I said I would back Nobleman, when he ran second in the Derby," said Hector, "and I'll not be run off him. I shall put enough to save me on Primrose, and if Arden's horse wins I'll back him for the Leger."

"It stands to reason if Primrose can win to-day, he must beat Nobleman in the Leger without the extra distance will make a difference," said Cohen.

Racing had commenced, and as the Eclipse Stakes was the third event on the card, Squire Arden became anxious, and wished the race was over.

The Eclipse Stakes meant more to him than Eric imagined. The large stake would give him ready money which he was sorely in need of. If Primrose won he would be able to speculate on the Leger, and stand to win a heavy stake.

"You look anxious, uncle," said Eric. "I hope the excitement of the race will not be too much for you."

"I certainly am anxious," said the Squire. "It is some years since I had a horse running. The old sensations are upon me again, and after this lapse of time, they come new to me. By the way, Eric, tell Findon to win easily if he can, and not draw the finish too fine. We shall have a better chance of knowing what Cannon Ball can do, if Primrose is ridden out."

"I will tell him," said Eric. "I am sure he will not throw a chance away. You remain here until I return, and win or lose, uncle, we will watch the race together."

"That's right, my boy," said the Squire, "and I hope we shall see Primrose come in first. Now leave me, and go and see Ned and Findon."

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE ECLIPSE STAKES.

AS usual with these big ten-thousand-pound races, there was a small field, eight horses only being announced as runners.

These mammoth stakes have not attained the popularity of a Derby or St. Leger, and are not as attractive as such handicaps as the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire.

It costs a considerable sum to run horses in these events, and most racing men prefer a dash on a handicap where the betting is more open, and there is a chance of winning a big stake at long odds.

The first two races were over, and had resulted in favour of the ring, and backers were eager to go for a recovery on Nobleman, who was regarded as having a chance second to none. The French horse, Golfonzo, was well backed, and many men from across the channel were present to see him run, and back their countryman's horse. Let Me Alone, a four-years-old, carried top weight—9st. 10lb. Primrose had 9st. 11lb., and Cambria, who ran in the popular red and white sleeves of Lord Ellesmere, had 9st. 6lb.

The remainder, including Nobleman and Golfonzo, carried 9st. 1lb., and were named Cromwell, Fernando, and Prince Paul.

Eric hurried across the paddock, where Ned Caunton was putting Primrose to rights. Findon, in Squire Arden's black jacket, white sleeves, and black cap, stood looking on with his top coat hiding the colours.

"How do you like the look of him, Findon?" asked Eric.

"If he's as good as he looks he ought to run well," replied the jockey.

"The Squire wishes you to win easily if you can," said Eric. "He means do not ride a close finish if you can help it. We have another colt at Arden, and want to make no mistake about the St. Leger trial. You will ride for us in the Leger, I suppose, Findon?"

"Certainly, if Mr. Arden wishes me to do so. I have no definite engagement at present. I would sooner ride for your uncle than anyone," said Findon.

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied Eric. "I am sure he will engage you, and give you a choice of mounts. It will be better for you to come to Arden, and ride in the Leger trial after this race. You will then be able to tell exactly which of the colts you prefer."

Ned Caunton having saddled Primrose, the lad walked him about until it was time to go to the post. Ned Caunton came across to Eric and Findon.

"Be sure and keep him as quiet as you can at the post," Ned said to the jockey. "Don't break away with him if you can help it, but when you think there is a chance dash off and keep well to the front. Don't ride a waiting race. Most of them will be waiting, and if you think the pace is not strong enough, make it yourself. Primrose will stay every inch of the distance, and he was tried with his weight up."

"I will do exactly as you wish," said Findon. "I always ride for a good place at the home turn on this course."

"Mind and keep clear of the rails. Don't get blocked. I should like to see you round the bend for home with a good lead if possible. If you are in front there, Findon, with a couple of lengths to the good they'll never catch you," said Ned.

"There goes the bell," said Eric. "I must go and look after the Squire."

He waited to see Findon in the saddle, and then hurried across the paddock.

It was a brilliant scene as the horses filed out of the enclosure on to the track.

The members' lawn was thronged with a well-dressed fashionable crowd of people.

The sun was shining gloriously, and a soft, cool breeze made the heat less overpowering.

Under such favourable circumstances it was not to be wondered the ladies had dressed in summer costumes, and the many-hued colours constantly changing as their wearers moved about made

a picture of dazzling brilliancy not easily forgotten.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was present in the royal stand, and, as usual, took great interest in all that was going on.

A fashionable party occupied the balcony upon which the Prince was quietly smoking a cigar, and looking with an amused smile upon the crowd below.

The dark foliage of the trees at the rear of the lawn contrasted well with the gay colours worn by the ladies. The band of the Scots Guards played near the flagstaff, and the scene was one of animation and excitement.

Tattersall's enclosure was packed, and the roar of the ring could be heard as the bookmakers shouted the odds.

Across the course the enclosure for coaches belonging to members of the club was well patronised, and thousands of people lined the railings reaching down nearly to the home turn.

As the horses filed down the track for the parade, a rush was made to the fences to catch a passing glimpse of the competitors.

Some of the horses were being led past the enclosures, but Primrose had no one at his head, and Findon sitting easily on him walked him quietly along.

One man on the course near the carriage enclosures, looked earnestly at Primrose and the familiar colours of Squire Arden.

"I hope he wins. Good luck to you and your horse, Squire."

It was Hiram Jackson murmured this wish. He had come to Sandown Park on the off chance of earning a few shillings by selling race-cards, and doing odd jobs about the carriages.

He had caught sight of Squire Arden and Eric in the enclosure, and had also seen Hector Norton.

Hiram knew there was little chance of his being seen by them, and he kept well out of the way in the rear of the carriages. The noise in the ring became louder. It was the pencilers' last opportunity of getting money into their books, as the horses were now at the post.

"Two to one Nobleman."

"Three to one Cambria."

"Five to one Golfonzo."

"Here, eight to one bar three. Any price some of these runners."

"Prince Paul?"

"Yes, sir. Fifty to one."

"A hundred to two. Thank you, sir. Two quid found," said the bookmaker to his clerk as he pocketed the money.

"What price Primrose?" asked Eric.

"Eight to one, sir; eighty to ten. Thank you, sir."

It was the only wager Eric had on the race, and he was quite satisfied. He had been so engrossed in the preliminaries that he had neglected having a bet until the horses were at the post.

"I took eighty to ten," said Eric, as he rejoined the Squire.

"You have put quite enough on," said Mr. Arden. "A ten-pound note should always be your limit, Eric."

"If I win the eighty," said Eric, "it goes on our best for the Leger. You do not object to that?"

"No," said the Squire, "you can play with the bookmakers' money, my boy, but never make ducks and drakes of your own."

A break away and Golfonzo galloped a couple of furlongs before he could be pulled up.

Another attempt, but Mr. Arthur Coventry was not satisfied, and the flag still remained up.

Findon found Primrose inclined to be restive after these two false starts.

"I hope they go next time," he thought. "They're off. Good start."

No false start this time.

"Well done, Findon," said Ned Caunton to himself. "Couldn't have been better. Keep your place, my lad."

Prince Paul rushed off with the lead, much to the joy of the sanguine backer who had taken a hundred to two about his chance. Already he had visions of what he would do when he handled that easily made century.

Golfonzo followed the outsider, and then came Primrose with Cambria, Nobleman, Let Me Alone, and Cromwell abreast, and Fernando whipping in.

Past the cottage they galloped, and along the railway side, and here Prince Paul fell back.



Findon felt Primrose was going strong, and he went up to Golfonzo, and the pair raced together.

"We're going well, Eric," said the Squire, whose eyesight was remarkably keen for his age.

"And the pace is hot," said Eric. "I hope Primrose will last it out."

"He's as likely to last as the others," said the Squire. "Where's Nobleman?"

"Coming up now," said Eric. "Malden's going to bring him with a rush at the finish."

The favourite was going well, but kept too far out of his ground to please his backers.

"Malden's mad," growled Hector Norton. "What the deuce can he be about letting Primrose steal a march like that."

Malden, however was riding to orders, and doing his best to win.

"Look uncle," said Eric, excitedly.

Squire Arden almost shouted in his excitement, as he saw the Magpie Jacket dash to the front, come round the bend like a flash, and enter the straight with a clear couple of lengths lead.

"Well done, Findon," said Ned."

"The fellow's a fool to bring a horse there," said the man next to him.

"You'll see whether he's much of a fool at the finish," said Ned.

"There, what did I tell you. Look at Nobleman," said the man.

The favourite had made up his ground fast, and was now closing on the Frenchman.

The excitement was becoming intense, and already the favourite looked all over a winner.

"Nobleman wins," shouted Hector Norton, excitedly.

"He's not won yet," said Sirius Cohen, who stood close to him.

"Look how he's overhauling the leaders," said Hector.

"And Primrose will take a bit of catching with the lead he's got," said Sirius.

"I'll bet you a pony Nobleman wins," said Hector.

"All right," said Sirius. "It can go down with the rest."

The race at this point was most interesting.

Primrose held the lead, and Nobleman had just disposed of Golfonzo, the Frenchman being beaten.

Squire Arden felt every pulse in his body tingle, as he saw the favourite bearing down on Primrose. What a terrible time it seemed to be before the winning post was reached.

The up-hill finish commenced to tell on Primrose, and Findon dared not press him harder.

A hundred yards from the judge's box Findon saw Nobleman's head creeping up alongside of him. It was now or never. If he did not rouse Primrose for a final effort he felt the favourite would beat him.

"Don't use the whip if you can possibly help it," Ned Caunton had said to him.

Findon was riding his hardest, and, as yet, he had not raised his whip.

To hundreds of people he seemed to be winning easily, and yet the jockey knew it would be touch and go at the finish.

Malden was hard at the favourite, who responded gamely. The remainder of the field were hopelessly out of it.

Squire Arden could not speak. He looked at the great battle between these thoroughbreds, and thought it was as fine a sight as he had ever seen. He almost forgot what he had at stake in his eagerness to see the best horse win. It was this feeling which made Squire Arden popular and beloved. He liked to see the best man prosper, just as he loved to see a good horse win, no matter whether he was a gainer or loser thereby.

What shouting and cheering on the stands. People cheered without cause, merely following the example of others. The enthusiasm was contagious, and everyone was in a flutter of excitement.

On came Primrose and Nobleman.

They were racing their best to win. With nostrils extended, necks stretched, every nerve and sinew in their bodies strained to the utmost tension, the gallant horses struggled on.

They were as eager to win as their riders. Their thoroughbred blood revolted at the idea of defeat.

Inch by inch the ground was contested.

Nobleman drew level, and the pair were locked together.

"Now," thought Findon, as he saw the judge's box a few yards in front, "I must do it."

He raised his whip, gave Primrose a powerful cut, and the colt responded with a last effort.

It was just in time. Past the judge's box they flashed, and the bearer of the Magpie Jacket had won by a head.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A POPULAR WIN.

ALTHOUGH Primrose was not favourite there could not have been a more popular win.

Volleys of cheers greeted horse and rider, and Squire Arden was congratulated on all sides.

To him it was a glorious win. He felt elated to think a horse of his own breeding, and trained privately at Arden, should win such an important race as the Eclipse Stakes.

The success of the once famous Magpie Jacket on its first reappearance on the racecourse was much commented upon, and Squire Arden was overjoyed to see those beloved colours first past the post.

He had not taken the old jacket out of its frame at Arden; he meant that to be carried on his best colt in the St. Leger.

Sir William Singleton was one of the first to congratulate him, and the Duke of Ollerton was evidently pleased, and did not conceal his satisfaction at the result.

"I have a request to make, Mr. Arden," said the Duke.

"It is granted if it is within my power," said the Squire.

"The Prince wishes to congratulate you personally," said the Duke.

"I am honoured," replied the Squire. "I will accompany your Grace."

Eric was highly pleased at the honour done his uncle.

The Prince received Squire Arden in his usual courteous and affable manner. It was his amiability under all circumstances that had won for His Royal Highness the love of his future subjects, and none are more loyal to him than racing-men.

"This is a victory, Ned," said the Squire, when he returned to the paddock. "The first time of asking, too."

A crowd had collected round Primrose, and looked with admiration at the colt.

It is wonderful how a win increases a horse's popularity.

Many men who did not give Primrose a show before the race were now loud in their praises of the colt, and said they always gave him a chance.

Among these was Hector Norton, who boasted about having given Sirius Cohen the correct tip weeks ago.

Cohen held his peace, and made no remark. If it pleased Hector Norton to brag, his doing so did him no harm.

Hector Norton had not lost over the race, but he had not won, and he would have much preferred to see Nobleman land the stake.

However, he determined to make the best of it, and back Primrose heavily for the Leger.

He offered his congratulations to the Squire, who was in such a good humour that he treated Hector cordially.

"I hope you had a good win," said Hector to Eric.

"I don't bet heavily," was Eric's reply. "I had a ten-pound note on at eight to one. That was the extent of my transactions."

Eric went to the telegraph office, and sent off a wire to Arden Hall, and also one to Nora Norton, at Beechwood, in which he related the good news of Primrose's victory.

"We'll get back to town as soon as possible," said the Squire, "and Ned will bring the colt home at once."

Eric was nothing loath to go. The remaining races did not interest him.

"We can take our own time, and walk leisurely across the course to the station," said Eric.

They passed out of the paddock gate, and across the course.

"Hallo, Eric," shouted a cheery voice from one of the drags.

Eric looked up and recognised an old school mate.

"You, Harry, I thought you were fighting for your country in Egypt or Africa, or some other outlandish place. This is Harry Power, uncle, an old school chum."

"Very pleased to meet you," said the Squire.

"I must congratulate you on your win," Mr. Arden," said Harry. "I never saw a more popular victory. You must have been refreshed by those hearty cheers."

"I was proud of them," said the Squire. "And so was Eric."

"Look out there. Where the deuce are you going to?" shouted Harry Power to a man carrying a hamper, and who knocked up against the Squire in his hurry.

"It's a fellow we got to help with the hampers," added Harry.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man, as he looked up.

"What, Hiram Jackson," said the Squire, in amazement, "what are you doing here?"

"Do you know the man?" asked Harry Power, surprised.

"He was a keeper at Arden once," said the Squire. "A very good man, and I was sorry to lose him."

Hiram Jackson was moving away, when Squire Arden called to him.

"Wait a moment, Jackson, I will speak to you directly."

"Curious we should come across him here," said Eric. "I hope Hector won't see him."

Hiram Jackson waited at the rear of the carriages, and Squire Arden and Eric joined him.

The Squire questioned his former keeper closely, and eventually, after much persuasion



and in deference to Mr. Arden's wishes, Hiram, in a few brief words, told his story.

"You must return to Arden at once," said the Squire. "It is monstrous you should have been treated in this manner. I will allow no servant of mine—for such I still regard you—to suffer under such a false accusation."

"But if I return, sir," said Hiram, "the story about my lass will come out, and I should not care for that."

"I do not think you need have any fear of that," said the Squire. "When Hector Norton hears I have heard your story, he will take care you are not prosecuted."

"His father will prosecute me," said Hiram.

"He is the last man to take such a step," said the Squire. "He will do all he can to keep the story of his son's shameful conduct a secret. As regards Hector Norton and your daughter, Hiram, we will see what can be done. My own opinion is she is better without him. He is not a man to be trusted. Here is five pounds, and return to Arden Hall at once, and resume your duties as gamekeeper."

"You are very kind, sir," said Hiram. "I will return at once."

"We shall be glad to have you back," said Eric.

"What a scoundrel young Norton is," said the Squire to Eric, when they were in the train. "When we reach Arden no time must be lost in letting him know Jackson is returning. He must

break the news to his father. There will be no danger to Hiram when he learns the truth. He will have to withdraw his charge, and persuade the superintendent there is no necessity to proceed further. I should like to hear the calling over the coals he will get when the superintendent hears of it."

"I am afraid Hector is a bad lot," said Eric. "I am awfully sorry for Nora's sake; she is so attached to him."

"By-the-bye," said the Squire, "I had almost forgotten about Nora. When are you going to be married?"

"The week after the Leger if you have no objection, uncle," said Eric. "Nora is agreeable."

"The sooner the better," said Squire Arden. "Nora is a lovable girl. The best of the lot in my opinion."

"If Cannon Ball is better than Primrose, as Ned thinks he is," said Eric, "the St. Leger ought to be a good thing for him."

"It should be," said the Squire. "I shall run them both, and if Cannon Ball is the better of the pair, Findon shall wear the old jacket and win in it."

They remained in London for the Sunday, and on Monday proceeded to Arden.

It was not until the Squire alighted at the Great Northern Station, Newark, that he became fully aware how popular the win of Primrose in the Eclipse Stakes was.

He was congratulated on all sides, and at the Clinton Arms the Squire was received with a cheer, and champagne was called for, and his health heartily drank. Many were the good wishes showered upon him for the success of his colors in the St. Leger.

When Arden was reached, the villagers turned out and cheered the Squire, who was immensely pleased at his reception.

"There's no doubt about the popularity of the win here," said Eric, smiling gladly at the thought of his uncle's pleasure in such a hearty welcome.

At the Hall, Mrs. Fairfield had prepared another hearty reception, and with a mother's thoughtfulness she had invited Mrs. Norton and Nora to be present to welcome Eric and the Squire home.

The Rev. Henry Burton was there and also Ruth Cauntton.

"If I was not afraid of my bishop," said the vicar, "I believe I should have set the bells ringing. If you win the St. Leger, Squire, the demands of the villagers will be irresistible. If I do not have the bells ringing, then I am afraid they will break open the doors and set them going in spite of me."

"I am so glad, Eric," said Nora. "How pleased your uncle must be."

"He is," said Eric, "and you are a dear good girl to come and welcome us home."

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Norton," said the Squire, "and Nora, too. Come and receive my blessing, young lady."

"There," said the Squire, as he kissed her, "I hope Eric is not jealous. If I were forty years younger I should feel inclined to try and cut him out, Nora."

The Rev. Henry and Ruth Caunton were engaged in conversation, and the Squire, always ready for a joke at the vicar's expense, said:

"Henry is making good use of his time. If you make the pace so warm in that quarter we shall have to set the bells going in 'earnest.'"

Ruth Caunton flushed, but looked pleased, and the vicar replied readily:

"You will have your little joke, Squire. I always take a favourable opportunity of saying a word or two in season to my parishoners."

"I notice you generally bestow your words in season upon the best looking ladies of your congregation. Beware of him, Ruth. He is hankering after slippers or some other comfortable article to ease his body. Do not be persuaded by his eloquence. Keep him at a safe distance. Middle-aged bachelor vicars and good-looking curates are dangerous," said the Squire.

"They would make a good match," whispered Mrs. Norton to Eric's mother.

"I never thought of it in that light," said Mrs. Fairfield, with a smile. "Now you mention it, they are a handsome couple, and Ruth is a most estimable girl."

"I have a surprise for you, William," she said to the Squire as she led the way to his room.

The framed magpie jacket had been gaily decorated with black and white ribbons, and in letters of gold over the top was the word "Primrose," and underneath "Eclipse Stakes," and the date.

The Squire's eyes filled with the pleasure he felt. Everyone was so kind to him, and fortune had favoured him just at the right moment.

"You are always thoughtful, Harriet," he said. "Nothing could have given me more pleasure."

They were very merry at Arden Hall, and Nora and her mother remained until the carriage came for them at ten o'clock.

Eric and Nora had been left to themselves during the afternoon, and he had taken the opportunity to mention about their marriage.

Nora was not happy at Beechwood, and she was nothing loath to let Eric have his own way, and accordingly, with the concurrence of Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Fairfield, and the Squire, the Wednesday following the St. Leger had been fixed upon as the day they were to be united.

"We have not long to wait now, Nora," said Eric. "You will soon be my wife, and have your home at Arden. Do you think you will be happy with us here?"

"Oh, yes, Eric. Everyone is so kind and good to me. And then, I love you very dearly. All I ask is to be near you always, dear," said Nora.

"And I shall strive to make your life happy, Nora, Do you think I shall succeed?"

"I am sure of it," she replied. "I hope I may prove myself worthy of you, Eric."

"And I of you, Nora," he said. "We shall be very happy in the years to come."

Mrs. Norton got on very well with the Squire.

She amused him with her quaint, outspoken sayings, and he knew she was a genuine, if not well educated, woman.

She had tact enough not to mention her husband's name to the Squire, as she was well aware of the strained relations between them.

When Mrs. Norton and Nora reached Beechwood they saw from Mr. Norton's face that something unusual had happened.

"I want to speak to you alone," he said to his wife.

This in itself was an unusual request. It was seldom Robert Norton condescended to consult his wife upon anything.

He entered his study, and Mrs. Norton followed, wondering what it could all mean.

"What is the matter, Bob?" she asked, kindly.

"A good deal is the matter," he said. "I'm in a hole—a deuce of a hole—Bessie."

Mrs. Norton's heart gave a jump. It was a long time since he had called her Bessie in the old tone he used in years gone by. Her honest heart warmed to him at once. She forgot all his slights and fits of temper. He was "her Bob" again, and in trouble, and she meant to help him,

"Tell me all about it, Bob," she said. "Is it business?"

"Yes, and bad business to. If I can't borrow ten thousand I'm ruined. If I can get that during the next couple of months I can keep going. The business is good enough, but I've lost a heap of money lately," he said.

"As bad as this, Bob. You ought to have told me before. Why not sell Beechwood?"

"Can't," he groaned. "It's mortgaged up to the hilt."

"We must face the worst together, Bob. We've done it in days gone by, and we'll do it again. Don't be down-hearted, Bob. Two months is a long time. Something may turn up. Do you remember in the old days when we were down on our luck how we used to hope for a rise, and it generally came. Ten thousand is a heap of money, but you'll weather the storm, Bob, never fear," she said, putting her arm round his neck.

Robert Norton looked into his wife's honest, homely face, and said:

"You're a good woman, Bessie. I wish I had been a different man. Prosperity spoilt me. I've never been happy in this big place. I wish I'd been kinder to you, Bessie. I've been a brute. If I get over this I'll be a different man. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you, Bob," she said, "you know I will forgive you, but there's nothing to forgive. I knew this sort of life did not suit you. We'll leave Beechwood and go to Nottingham. In a short time you'll pull round. Don't give

in, Bob. We've weathered worse storms than this together."

His wife's words cheered him. Robert Norton in adversity was a different being to the purse-proud boaster and would-be county magnate.

"Leave me now, Bessie," he said. "You have given me hope. I will try and pull round."

Then a bit of his old worldliness crept out, and he asked:

"When does Nora get married?"

"The week after the Leger," said Mrs. Norton.

"That's better," said Robert Norton. "He might cry off if he heard about this business."

"There you are wrong, Bob," she said, quickly. "Eric, I am certain, would do all in his power to help you, because you are Nora's father. He loves her dearly."

"He thinks I'm a rich man," said Robert Norton.

"I don't believe he's given it a thought," said his wife.

"Perhaps not," said Robert Norton. "All the better for him if he has not, he will not be disappointed. Now leave me, Bessie."

When Robert Norton was alone he sat examining papers and making calculations.

He was quick at figures, and had a keen grasp of financial business, like many another man with only a smattering of education.

"After an hour's work, he looked at the clock and saw it was midnight.



"There's no help for it," he muttered. "I must raise ten thousand pounds somehow. There ought not to be much difficulty about it. When a firm's known to be shaky there's not much chance of obtaining money. I'll get it somehow. I've been a fool. I'm not cut out for a county swell, and I ought to have known it. There's one consolation, I shall have more sense in the future."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## AMONG THE PARTRIDGES.

HIRAM JACKSON returned to Arden, and Hector Norton thought it best to make a clean breast of it to his father.

This he had done, and he was much surprised at the manner in which his communication had been received. He had expected a scene. True his father had spoken harshly to him, but not at all as he anticipated.

Robert Norton was considerably changed since he had got into financial difficulties. He regarded many things in a different light, and as Hector Norton was unaware of this he was surprised.

Robert Norton listened to all Hector had to say, and then said:

"You have behaved like a scoundrel. I did not think you would have been so base. The information against Jackson must be withdrawn at once. You had better see the superintendent about it yourself. I am sorry I was harsh with Amy Jackson. She must be attended to. Where is she?"

"How should I know?" said Hector.

"Don't answer me in that off hand manner," said his father. "You will have to find out where she is. What do you intend doing?"

"How do you mean?" asked Hector, amazed. "What can I do?"

"You know what you ought to do," said his father. "It is not for me to tell you. You have made your own bed, and ought to lie on it."

"I can't marry the girl," said Hector.

"Why?" asked his father. "That is the only honourable course open to you."

"It's ridiculous," said Hector. "How can I marry the daughter of an old poaching vagabond, like Hiram Jackson?"

"You've proved yourself much worse than Hiram Jackson," said his father. "If you do not find out Amy Jackson, I shall do it myself."

Hector Norton knew where Amy Jackson was, but he had no desire she should meet his father.

To change the subject he said :

"I am short of money. I have not drawn much out of the firm lately——"

"And you'll draw less in future," said his father.

"But I must have money," said Hector.

"Listen to me," said his father. "I may as well tell you myself as leave it to someone else to inform you."

He then proceeded to give Hector an account of how matters stood in the business.

To say Hector Norton was surprised, would be to put a mild construction upon his feelings; he was amazed and angry.

He fumed and fretted, and said he ought to have been informed of all this before. He was heavily in debt and wanted money, and he must have it.

His father gave him no further satisfaction. He merely said, as he left him :

"I shall endeavour to pull through, and you must assist me all you can. If you persist in your present line of conduct there is only one course open to me."

"And that is?" asked Hector.

"To dissolve our partnership, and get you out of the firm," said his father.

Hiram Jackson was delighted to return to Arden, and find everything was safe.

Bob Stubbins at once sent for his daughter, and the meeting between them was affectionate.

It was now September, and partridge shooting had commenced.

The Arden shooting was not extensive, but what there was of it was good.

Squire Arden was not a believer in slaughter amongst partridges or pheasants, or, in fact, any game. He rejoiced in fair shooting, and, as he put it, "giving the birds a chance."

He saw no pleasure in standing at a "hot corner," and shooting birds as fast as the guns could be loaded. This he did not call sport.

"I'm not compelled to send my game to market," said the Squire. "I don't breed game to supply dealers. I shoot for the pleasure of shooting, not to kill so many brace, or to reap a profit on the transaction."

Eric was of the same opinion as his uncle.

They shot together over the turnips and the stubble, and enjoyed a long tramp in the bright September days.

The Squire's dogs were well trained. They were perfect dogs to shoot over, and were not guilty of many mistakes.

Partridges were plentiful, as the season for rearing had been good. Bob Stubbins took good care the Squire should have plenty of sport.

Partridge shooting commenced at Arden the first week in September, and what with popping at the "bits of brown," and watching the colts at work for the St. Leger, Squire Arden did not find the time hang heavily on his hands.

When he walked to the track he generally had his dogs and his gun with him, and took an occasional shot. It was this casual shooting that pleased the Squire.

One morning Eric and Ned Caunton were on the training track waiting for the Squire.

Findon, the jockey, was present. It was the week before the St. Leger, and he had arrived the night before to ride in the trial.

"Here he comes," said Eric, as the Squire walked up.

"Got a brace as I came through the turnips," he said, as he put his gun and birds down, the dogs lying beside them, "Well, Findon, which do you ride in the trial?"

"Primrose," said Findon. "I know exactly what he can do, and if Cannon Ball beats me he is a clinker."

"He'll beat you right enough," said Ned Caunton.

"I doubt it," said Findon.

The colts looked fit, and as Findon eyed them critically, he said :

"It's not often an owner can boast of a couple like that in the St. Leger. Are they going for the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire?"

"Yes," said Ned. "I have persuaded Mr. Arden to enter them both."

"I don't care for those races," said the Squire, "but Caunton says it is a pity to miss them."

"So it is," said Eric. "Make hay while the sun shines. The winner of the Leger must have a chance in the Cesarewitch."

The trial came off as Ned Caunton anticipated, and Findon was much surprised.

"Cannon Ball is sure to win Mr. Arden. He beat me easily. I rode Primrose right out."

"They both run in the race on their merits," said the Squire. "Which will you ride Findon?"

"Cannon Ball," said Findon. "It will be my first Leger win."

"You seem confident about it," said Eric.

"I am. Nobleman is the only one I know of to beat, and Cannon Ball ought to dispose of him easily," said Findon.

Squire Arden was greatly pleased at the result of the trial. Cannon Ball was his favourite, and he was glad Findon had elected to ride him.

When the Squire and Eric returned to the Hall, Findon said to Ned Caunton.

"You've never had a better thing than this, Ned?"

"No, I don't think I have," said Ned Caunton. "You're lucky enough to get a mount like Cannon Ball."

"Primrose is favourite," said Findon. "Cannon Ball is at a hundred to four offered. What a chance to make money. Let me stand in with you Ned. I don't have much on, but I must have a "pony" on my mount."

"That will do me," said Ned, "I'll have fifty on, and you can have half; I'll ask Mr. Eric to do it for us."

"It's a pity to run both of them," said Findon.

"So I think," replied the trainer, "but the Squire is determined to do so."

"And fight it out on their merits?" asked Findon.

"Decidedly," said Ned. "Even if it came to Primrose beating Cannon Ball."

"Not much fear of that," said Findon, "but I have seen strange results occur when two horses out of the same stable have run."

Hector Norton heard of the trial at Arden, and that Cannon Ball had won; but he thought it only a ruse on Ned Caunton's part, in case the result should leak out, and that Primrose was the better of the pair.

To this belief he still clung, and so did Sirus Cohen, who had put a lot of money on the winner of the Eclipse Stakes for the St. Leger.

Hector reported the result of the trial to Sirus, and although he was inclined to agree with the opinion that Primrose was the better of the pair, he meant to have a "saver" on Cannon Ball.

"It appears to me, Eric," said the Squire, as he glanced at the paper a morning or so after the trial, "that the public are putting their faith in Primrose. Would it not be as well to execute our commission in favour of Cannon Ball at once, so that no doubt need be entertained as to which is the better colt?"

"As you like, uncle," replied Eric. "Not many owners would consider the public in such a matter."

"But I do," said the Squire. "They ought to be considered. To a certain extent a Leger horse is public property. You had better see Banks, and tell him to work the commission in favour of Cannon Ball."

"How much is he to put on?" said Eric.

"The colt is quoted at a hundred to four," said the Squire. "Give him instructions to back him to win thirty thousand pounds at the best rate of odds he can obtain."

"That's a large sum," said Eric.

"It is," said the Squire; "but you must remember I have the Eclipse winnings to bet with. If Primrose had not won that race a modest wager over the St. Leger would have satisfied me."

"Ned Cauntton wants to put fifty on," said Eric; "and there is my eighty I won over Primrose."



"Tell Ned he can have the longest price to his money, and so can you, Eric. The average will satisfy me."

"That is very liberal," said Eric. "I will see Banks at once. He is in Nottingham, and I will go over this afternoon."

Eric sent a wire to Richard Banks, and met him by appointment at the Flying Horse in the evening.

Eric explained to him what the Squire desired, and Banks said he would go to London and make all arrangements.

"In order to secure as long a price as possible I will have an agent in Manchester who will back Cannon Ball at a certain hour," said Banks.

"Do exactly as you like about it, Dick," said Eric. "I know you are to be trusted."

"What a good thing it must be if Cannon Ball is better than Primrose," said Banks.

"He won the trial comfortably," said Eric; "and as Findon rode Primrose there could be no mistake."

"There ought to be none," said Banks. "And Findon is straight, I think."

"I'm sure of it," said Eric. "He's a jockey I trust thoroughly."

Dick Banks found his commission easier to work than he imagined.

The Leger was regarded as a somewhat open race, as it was said Nobleman had improved vastly, and that three or four more horses had good chances.

Primrose remained favourite at a short price, but half-a-dozen others were well backed, and there was every indication the field would be larger than usual.

When Cannon Ball was so heavily backed, it naturally had the effect of weakening the position of Primrose in the market, and from a hundred to four he quickly came down to half the odds, and finally left off at six to one.

Squire Arden was quite satisfied with the manner in which the commission was worked, and with the average returned. Ned Cauntton was laid a thousand and Eric sixteen hundred, and the Squire had the balance, which amounted, all told, to about thirty-one thousand pounds if Cannon Ball won.

Hector Norton saw how Cannon Ball had been backed and commenced to be uneasy, and Sirus Cohen used powerful language when he read in the *Sportsman*:

"A heavy commission was executed last night in favour of Cannon Ball for the St. Leger. We are given to understand the colt was backed on behalf of his owner, and that in all probability Findon will have the mount. Under these circumstances backing Primrose cannot be considered wise, although Mr. Arden is lucky if he has a horse in his stable that can beat the Eclipse Stakes winner."

"I've got a 'monkey' on Primrose," said Cohen, "and now I must back the other one. I wonder how young Norton stands. He'll have

to pay me after the race; I've waited long enough."

Every morning Cannon Ball's position in the market improved. On the Monday night before the race he was made favourite, and Primrose went back to six and seven to one. It was generally known the pair would run on their merits, and not a few pinned their faith to Primrose, whose public form was a good guide.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE EVE OF THE ST. LEGER.

TUESDAY'S racing was over, and nothing was talked about in Doncaster but the coming race the next day.

Doncaster represents all Yorkshire at the Leger Meeting, and for the time being the whole county is devoted to horse-racing.

A quaint, old-fashioned place Doncaster, and the Town Moor has been the scene of many a great struggle for the St. Leger Stakes.

Squire Arden's colts arrived safely from the Hall, and were quartered at the Salutation Hotel, close to the course.

Naturally considerable anxiety was manifested to see them, and quite a crowd followed them to their quarters.

Eric and Ned Caunton came from Newark together, and the Squire was to follow on the morning of the race. The Vicar of Arden was in a sore state of distress.

He felt he ought not to go to Doncaster, and yet he would have given almost anything to be present.

"Why can't you go, Henry?" said the Squire. "Come with me in the morning. I have a special carriage, and my sister, Ruth Cauntton, and Nora Norton are going. You will complete the party, and can look after the ladies."

"I should like to go," said the vicar. "What will the bishop say?"

"He'll not know you have been," said the Squire. "Come, say you will join us. I am sure even the bishop would grant you the necessary leave on such an occasion as this."

"It's against my conscience," said the vicar.

"Nonsense," replied the Squire. "Your conscience will not reproach you. It is your duty to go. You can see the amount of sin and wickedness there is at Doncaster on Leger Day, and then preach a glowing sermon against the iniquities of racing next Sunday. It's a splendid opportunity. You really ought not to neglect such a chance."

"Tempter, beware," said the vicar, laughing. "You are chaffing me. I have a good mind to adopt your proposal, and lecture you from the pulpit next Sunday for setting the people a bad example and encouraging them to gamble by winning the St. Leger."

"Then you consider it a foregone conclusion I shall win?" asked the Squire.

"Ned Caunton tells me Cannon Ball cannot lose," said the vicar.

"And I suppose you have put a trifle on him?" said the squire.

"I have not. I shall not bet even if I go to Doncaster. I consider it most improper," said the vicar.

"So do I," replied the Squire. "If Cannon Ball wins, I'll re-furnish the vicarage for you."

"The vicarage, I can assure you, is very comfortable," said the vicar.

"I daresay," said the Squire. "But it is too old-fashioned for a modern young lady."

"What *do* you mean?" asked the vicar, amazed.

"I am surprised at you, Henry," said the Squire. "I am thinking of the future, when the Rev. Henry Burton has taken unto himself a wife."

"That is a very remote contingency," said the vicar.

"Indeed!" replied the Squire. "I fancy you would get a favourable reply if you put a certain question to Ruth Caunton."

"Do you really think so?" asked the vicar, eagerly.

"There! you have betrayed yourself," said the Squire. "Will you chance it, Henry? If Ruth says 'Yes,' I'll fit up the vicarage for you if I win the St. Leger."

"You are too generous," said the vicar. "What an awful position for me to be in. The Vicar of

Arden united to the daughter of the Squire's trainer, and his house set in order by means of a Leger winner."

"You will be called the sporting parson after this, Henry," said the Squire, laughing. "But come, will you accept my invitation and go to Doncaster with us?"

"I will," said the Rev. Henry Burton. "I do not suppose it will demoralise me."

"Have you been at a race meeting before?" asked the Squire, with a sly glance.

"Oh, yes," replied the vicar. "I am afraid in my college days I was over fond of racing. I once rode in a race."

"Did you win?" asked the Squire.

"No; but my horse came in first, only, unfortunately, he had deposited me in a ditch some distance in the rear. The animal continued his career, regardless of my sufferings; and I heard some time afterwards that he cleared every obstacle, and came in first. Ill-natured people said this was a clear proof it was not the fault of the horse when I came off at the ditch."

The Squire laughed heartily, and said:

"You're quite a sportsman, Henry. I heard you were rather wild at college. One thing, however, I am quite certain of," added the Squire, kindly.

"And that is?" asked the vicar.

"That you will never disgrace your cloth. I'd sooner trust Henry Burton, Vicar of Arden, to pilot me along the narrow road than some of these very good men who have never kicked over the

traces in their lives—that is, according to their version.”

The vicar grasped the Squire’s hand, as he said:

“You’re a good man, William. There’s many a parson would do well to follow the example you set in your daily life.”

“Your influence, Henry,” said the Squire. “Don’t forget that has much to do with leading me aright.”

“Your own good heart is the best leader you can follow,” said the vicar. “Follow its dictates, and you will not go far astray.”

These men, Squire and vicar, were an excellent example of the meaning of true friendship.

“Then I can count on your presence to-morrow?” said the Squire. “Remember, we leave at nine o’clock, so do not be late.”

“I will be there,” said the vicar. “The die is cast. Bishop or no bishop, I must see Cannon Ball win the Leger.”

The Squire went into his room.

He looked at the place on the wall where the Magpie Jacket was wont to hang.

It was not there. The Squire had himself taken it out of the frame, and handed it to Eric.

“It is in good preservation,” said the Squire. “Tell Findon there has never been a dishonourable stain upon it; and also tell him I hope it will bring him luck, and that he will carry it to victory on Cannon Ball.”



Squire Arden sat down and thought over his chances in the race on the morrow.

A dreamy feeling stole over him, and presently he fell into a light sleep.

He was dreaming, and in his sleep he heard the roar of the multitude on the Doncaster moor.

He saw the vast crowd of people surging to and fro like the waves of an angry sea.

Then he saw the horses start, and he watched them as they raced round the course.

Then he heard a shout: "The favourite's beat. Primrose wins."

His dream changed. He was out hunting.

A fair girl was riding by his side. He loved her, and she loved him. He had asked her to be his wife, and she had consented.

They were full of life and joy and happiness. All the earth teemed with mirth and gladness for them.

A sudden change, and he saw the girl he loved with his whole heart pale and bleeding.

He saw her fair hair covered with blood, which streamed down her death-like face.

Nevermore would he hear her sweet voice, or listen to her loving words. A cruel fate had separated them on the verge of their happiness.

No hope. There she lay motionless. They told him she was dead. He would not believe it. He flung himself from his horse, and madly clasped her in his arms.

Her blood stained his hunting coat; her hair streamed over his shoulder. He kissed her lips. His despair was terrible. He would not believe her dead. There must be some hope. None. She was gone, and he must go through life alone. Again he kissed the dear face passionately, and as he did so swore to be true to her memory until he was called upon to follow her.

He had been true. He had never forgotten her. He would never forget that memory of his youth long since passed away in the mist of years.

Squire Arden heaved a sigh, and a tear stole from under his closed eyelid, and glided gently down his cheek. He still slept.

Ah! what is this he hears? The cheering of a vast crowd.

In his dream he sees himself leading in a horse surrounded by an excited throng. He is proud and happy, for it is the winner of the St. Leger he holds by the bridle.

A tall, graceful girl comes to meet him. It is a ghost from the past, a memory of years gone by.

He sees the woman he loved once more. She is alive and well, and has come to cheer his victory. She is not dead; it has all been a dream. He takes her hand, he draws her to his heart, and kisses her.

Squire Arden woke with a start, and a merry voice said :

"A pair of gloves, Squire. I could not resist the temptation. I have won them fairly."

It was Nora Norton who had kissed him, and roused him from his sleep and dream.

That dream was vividly impressed upon his memory, and Nora saw he was much affected.

The girl knelt at his side, and said, as she looked lovingly into his face:

"What is it troubles you? I am so sorry I disturbed you."

The old man bent his head, and kissed her tenderly.

"You have won your gloves, Nora," he said. "Let me tell you a story. I thought it was someone else kissed me; someone I loved very much a long time ago. I was dreaming of her, Nora. Dreaming of a beautiful, bright girl—a girl with hair like your own, Nora, soft as silk."

The Squire stroked her hair fondly, and Nora's eyes filled with tears.

"Those days of my youth came back to me, Nora, and I once more saw the girl I loved. We were to be married, and everyone said we were made for each other.

"But it was willed otherwise, and she had to leave me. She was killed by a fall in the hunting field, and I was alone. All these years, Nora, I have been alone, and I have never forgotten her.

"When you kissed me, I was dreaming she came to meet me as I led in the winner at Doncaster, and I clasped her to my heart and

kissed her. It was at that moment you roused me, Nora. Will you kiss me again?"

Nora Norton put her arm round Squire Arden's neck and, as she kissed him, fondly, said:

"Yours is a sad story. How you must have suffered! I know how I should feel if anything happened to Eric. I should die."

"Then you love him very dearly, Nora?" asked the Squire.

"Yes—oh, yes. More than I can express," said Nora.

"And you must live at the Hall with Eric," said the Squire, "and I shall see again the love of my youth in you. Who do you think is going to join our party to-morrow, Nora?"

"Who is it, Squire Arden? Do tell me," said Nora.

"The Rev. Henry Burton, Vicar of Arden," said the Squire, trying to look grave.

"I am glad," said Nora. "He is a dear man."

"I fancy someone else also thinks he is a dear man," said the Squire.

"And so do I," said Nora.

"Who?" asked the Squire.

"Ruth," said Nora.

"You have hit the mark," said the Squire. "I really think it will be a match."

"I hope so," said Nora; "I love Ruth."

"She is a very nice girl," said the Squire, "but I think Eric's choice is my favourite."

"Thank you," said Nora. "What a pretty compliment."

"You deserve it," said the Squire.

Nora Norton and Ruth Caunton were at Arden Hall for the night in order to be ready to start for Doncaster next morning.

Punctually at nine the Squire drove to the station, and found the Rev. Henry Burton waiting for them.

The Doncaster special was in good time.

"Your carriage, Squire," said the station-master, as he opened the door of a first-class compartment.

When the Squire and the ladies entered he shut the door. He thought the Rev. Henry Burton had merely come to bid them good-bye. Much to his surprise he saw the vicar open the carriage door and step in.

"The station-master fancied I was more at home on the platform," said the vicar, laughing, "than in a Doncaster Race special."

"He's a violent Methodist," said the Squire. "You will be held up as an awful example at the next chapel meeting, Henry."

"My backsliding will be my undoing," said the vicar.

"It is very good of you to accompany us," said Ruth.

"Are you pleased to see me?" said the vicar, who was seated next to her.

"Yes, very pleased indeed," honestly said Ruth.

"Then I am glad I came. I would do much to please you, Miss Caunton," said the vicar.

"Bless me, if the Vicar of Arden hasn't gone to Doncaster!" said the station-master to himself.

"What's the world coming to?"

## CHAPTER XXI.

## DONCASTER.

LEGER morning at Doncaster. Who that has seen it on such an occasion can forget it?

The usually quiet town is alive early, full of life and bustle, even before it is daylight. There is no rest for the hotel-keepers, and vast preparations have been going on for weeks past to meet the demands of the hungry thousands.

It is a hearty, good-tempered, and often humorous crowd that assembles at Doncaster on Leger Day. Special trains run from all parts of the country, and it is marvellous how rapidly and regularly they arrive and depart.

The moment a visitor emerges from the station he is beseged by a crowd of lads anxious to sell him a correct card, and also a packet of butterscotch. The man who visits Doncaster and declines to invest money in butterscotch is regarded as a hopeless case.

On this particular Leger morning, Doncaster was full of people.

The streets were crowded, and every house where refreshments could be obtained was thronged.

Trains arrived in rapid succession, unloaded their human freight, and shunted off to make room for others.

A constant stream of people wended their way from the station to the course, and this continued for several hours.

A. Yorkshire crowd on Leger day differs vastly from an Epsom crowd on Derby day.

On the Town Moor nearly every man present knows something about a horse. At Epsom not one in a hundred knows anything at all about either horses or racing.

When the Squire and his party arrived at Doncaster they were met by Eric, who had a drag waiting for them, and they were driven direct to the course.

"No one would take you for a reverend gentleman," said Eric, addressing the vicar. "You are disguised for the occasion."

"I did not think it necessary to appear on the scene as Vicar of Arden," said the Rev. Henry Burton. "For this day only I am a layman."

Eric and Nora exchanged the usual greetings on such occasions, and were mutually satisfied to be near each other.

"The horses will come over before the race," said Eric. "No good bringing them more than an hour before."

"How are they?" asked the Squire.

"Splendid," said Eric. "I think there is no doubt we shall win."

Ned Caunton had an anxious time.



He had two colts in his charge, each of which had been backed for a lot of money by the public the previous night. Sirius Cohen and Hector Norton had called at the Salutation, and endeavoured to extract from Ned the latest intelligence.

Ned Caunton had been given a hint as to Hector Norton's true character, and he was not disposed to be over-communicative.

"Do you really think Cannon Ball will beat Primrose?" asked Hector.

"Can't say," said Ned. "Findon has elected to ride him; so he evidently thinks so."

"But are you quite certain Findon will be on the back of Cannon Ball when they go to the post?" asked Sirius, with a knowing look. "You see these rumours are often put about, in order to keep the public in the dark."

"I've no doubt that is the sort of thing *you* have been used to," said Ned; but there is none of these shady tricks about Mr. Arden's horses."

"Oh, indeed!" sneered Cohen. "I don't suppose your boss is much better than anyone else."

"Hold your tongue, can't you?" growled Hector.

"No, I can't," said Sirius. "I reckon I'm as good as Caunton any day, and I'm not going to be snubbed by him."

"I am sorry to see you in such company, Mr. Norton," said Ned. "Take my advice, and steer clear of such men as Mr. Sirius Cohen."

"You had better mind what you say," said Sirius, angrily.

Ned Caunton took no notice of the remark, but quietly walked out of the room.

"Nice sort of fellow to give you information," said Cohen. "I don't believe he ever told you anything about these horses; at all events, it does not look like it."

"You're a fool," said Hector. "If you'd kept a civil tongue in your head, we should have got at the truth. As it is, you have made a mess of it."

"That's it, blame me," said Cohen. "'Pon my word, you're a cool hand. Do you suppose I was going to let that old fool bounce me? Not I. That's not my way."

"Now we are just as wise as ever," said Hector. "I am certain myself about Primrose being the one."

"And I'm just as certain Cannon Ball is," said Sirius. "I saw Dick putting the money on, and I tell you he never stopped at a decent offer against Cannon Ball. He snapped it up in a twinkle. And when Dick does business in that style you can bet your bottom dollar it's genuine. It's you that's made a mess of it. If you'd played your cards properly with that Caunton girl, we should have been certain how to go on."

"I did my best," said Hector. "I say, Cohen, can you lend me fifty ready. I'll pay you back this month. I've a lump to draw out of the business."

Sirius Cohen stopped, and looked at Hector Norton, as he said :

"You are about the nicest young man I ever met. Here you owe me no end of money, and you coolly ask for another fifty ready. Do you think I am made of money?"

"You have heaps," said Hector. "Now come in here, and I'll give you a bill for it. How much shall we say for the fifty?"

They entered a small hotel, and with difficulty secured a pen and ink.

"If you must have it I can't do it under a hundred-and-fifty," said Sirus. "It's risky, uncommon risky."

"You mean to say you have the infernal cheek to want a bill for a hundred-and-fifty when you only lend me fifty for a month?" asked Hector.

"You've hit the mark, my cherub?" said Sirus. "That is precisely what I mean."

"Then you're a cursed old rogue," said Hector, hotly.

"Don't call me names," said Cohen. "I've been insulted once this morning through you, and I tell you I'm about full of it. I will not let you have the money at any price now."

Hector saw he had made a mistake, and said:

"I did not mean it, Sirus. I'm upset. I've had such deuced bad luck. I'll give you a bill for a hundred-and-fifty. Hand over the money."

After some persuasion, Sirus Cohen counted out ten five-pound notes to Hector, and pocketed his bill for a hundred-and-fifty."

"I'll see you to-morrow," said Hector Norton, and left him.

"Who's that young chap, Sirius?" asked a member of the ring, who had seen Cohen hand over the money. "Has he had much luck? What did he strike you for?"

"I have been throwing good money after bad," said Cohen. "He got another fifty out of me. He owes me a tidy sum now."

"What did you get in exchange for the fifty?" asked the bookmaker.

"A little bill," said Sirius, with a grin.

The bookmaker laughed.

"Who is the young pigeon?" he asked.

"His name is Hector Norton, a son of old Norton, of Beechwood. They have a big lace place in Nottingham."

"Do you mean Norton and Son?" asked the bookmaker.

"Yes. A good firm, I'm told," said Sirius. "You're a Nottingham man—you ought to know."

"I know the firm, but I did not know that was Hector Norton. He's a nice young man. You'll have to fish for your money there, Sirius."

"How's that?" asked Sirius Cohen.

"I hear the firm's shaky. Old Norton's tried to keep it dark, but these things will leak out."

"The scoundrel," said Cohen. "It's robbery. He's robbed me of that fifty just the same as though he had taken it out of my pocket. I'll get even with him for it."

"Sorry I spoke," said the bookmaker. "If you keep quiet he'll pay you I have no doubt. The

old man is sure to raise money enough to turn the firm into a company anyway."

Sirus Cohen went out of the hotel, and walked towards the course in an unenviable frame of mind. He hated being done, and he considered Hector Norton had got the best of him.

Meanwhile, all was bustle and excitement on the course.

The Leger candidates were eagerly scanned, and Squire Arden's pair were voted the pick of the lot.

The general opinion was that he was foolish to run them both, but Squire Arden was determined on this point.

A dozen horses made up the field, and they were an average lot.

Cannon Ball held the position of favourite, but despite this his stable mate did not lack backers, and many people backed the pair coupled.

"That jacket has not been worn for some years, Findon," said the Squire. "It has been in many a good race."

"I hope I shall win in it to-day," said the jockey. "I wish you would strike Primrose out."

"No," said the Squire; "I should not do it now even if I felt inclined. It is too late. Why do you wish Primrose out of the race?"

"I've been unlucky once or twice in similar cases," said Findon. "I mean I have ridden the wrong one for the stable, and the other fellow's won."

"You need have no fear this time," said Eric "Cannon Ball is certain to beat Primrose."

"I hope so," said Findon.

Ned Caunton had put the finishing touches to the colts, and came up to the Squire.

"Cannon Ball is a bit restless," he said. "He does not take to a crowd so readily as Primrose. He's more excitable."

"How's his temper?" asked Findon.

"That's all right," replied Ned. "You need have no fear on that score. You had better ride your own race on him, Findon. You ought to know how to ride a Leger horse by this time. One thing you need not be afraid of, and that is, Cannon Ball will stay the course. Don't rely too much upon his turn of speed, but keep him at it. Primrose will make the pace for you, and it's sure to be hot. The hotter it is the better it will suit Cannon Ball. Primrose will have had enough of it a couple of furlongs from home, and then you'll find it easy work to come along on Cannon Ball."

"You'd better not let Primrose steal a march on you," said the Squire. "Remember he's a good one."

"He will not stay it out, Squire," said Ned. "At least, it is long odds against his doing so if he makes the running."

"Good luck to you, Findon, and remember, you have five hundred to nothing if you win. I hope I shall have to give you a cheque," said the Squire.

"Thank you, sir," said Findon, as he threw his leg over Cannon Ball, Ned giving him a lift up. "I will do my best to win, but I wish Primrose had been out of it."

"How he harps on that," said the Squire.

Ned Caunton gave instructions to Tindal to make the running on Primrose, and when the Squire was out of hearing, he added:

"Make it hot. I want Cannon Ball to win, the Squire's set his heart on it. He'd much rather see him win than Primrose. You'll get a fair cut out of the stake, never fear."

"I'll do my best," said Tindal. "What if Primrose gets a break on them and they never catch him?"

"You will have no fear of that," said Ned. "He'll not last it out. If such an extraordinary thing did occur, you'd have to win, for the Squire is determined they shall both be ridden out."

Tindal was on his first Leger mount, and he meant to win if he could.

He was told to make the pace on Primrose and he would do it.

He had an idea he might get a big lead, and then if his mount could last it out the field would not have time to catch him up.

In the ring Cannon Ball was still a firm favourite. Nobleman was well backed, and a lot of money went on Primrose for a place. Six of the Derby runners were in the field, and a dark horse called Orlando II. was heavily backed.

Cannon Ball and Primrose went out together, and a cheer greeted the favourite.

Findon looked at Primrose and thought:

"What a dashed bit of bad luck if he beat me. Don't get too far ahead," he said to Tindal.

"All right, Fin," replied the jockey; "but I've got to make the pace hot remember. Those are my orders, so don't blame me if I beat you."

"Then you mean to try?" said Findon.

"I have orders to win if I can, and also to make the pace for you. They don't give Primrose much chance. Do you?" asked Tindal.

"Not much. He won't stay the course," said Findon; but he doubted the truth of his words.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE ST. LEGER.

THE course was cleared. Only a few policemen remained on the track. The black mass of people disappeared as if by magic.

At Doncaster, despite the enormous crowd on Leger day, the course is quickly cleared, and the vast concourse of people behave in a most admirable manner.

The stands were packed on balconies and roof, while down below the people were massed together in a dense throng.

Opposite the stands a huge crowd lined the rails, every face eager and expectant, waiting for the signal to be given.

The horses were at the starting-post, near the paddock, a splendid view of them being obtained from the stands.

A sudden hush fell upon the vast crowd. For a moment the roar of the ring ceased as the book-makers glanced at the starters; but it broke out again with redoubled vigour, and the lull was only temporary.

"Cannon Ball is restless," said the Squire. "Look how quietly Primrose stands on the rails. It would be strange if he won after all."

"Just missed him," said Eric, excitedly, as Orlando II. lashed out and nearly caught Cannon Ball a bang in the ribs.

"I wish they would start," said Ruth. "Poor old father, how anxious he will be. He has set his heart on Cannon Ball scoring a win for the Squire."

"And I hope his wish will be gratified," said the vicar. "I feel quite excited, Miss Cauntton. It reminds me of the days of my youth. I am afraid that is a long while ago," he added, with a sigh, as he looked at Ruth.

"Surely not long enough to make you sigh so regretfully," said Ruth. "You look quite a young man compared with some of the men much younger than yourself."

"Do you really think so?" asked the vicar.

"I do, indeed. You must not call yourself an old man for many long years to come," said Ruth. "Oh, look, Mr. Burton, Cannon Ball nearly unseated Findon."

Cannon Ball was causing some delay at the post; but the starter saw Findon was doing his best to obey orders, and he did not mean to leave the jockey at the post when the flag fell.

Findon took his mount on the outside, and Cannon Ball quieted down.

A break away and Cannon Ball was pulled up with difficulty.

"This delay will not help us much," said the Squire.

Nora Norton was in a flutter of excitement, and she longed to see the horses start and have the suspense over.

Hector Norton was inwardly congratulating himself, when he saw Primrose so quiet and Cannon Ball in such a fretful mood.

"It's all in favour of Primrose," he said to himself. "I hope he wins."

A sudden change in the crowd, a general movement, and then a shout which echoed far and wide denoted the flag was down, and the great race had commenced.

Strictly to orders Tindal took Primrose to the front and made the pace a cracker.

The race needs but little description until that famous spot, the Rifle Butts, a little over six furlongs from the finish, was reached.

Tindal followed out his instructions to the letter. He kept Primrose going, and now as he glanced back he could see a great gap between himself and the rest of the field.

Comments on the race could be heard on all sides as the excited crowd gazed steadfastly towards the Rifle Butts.

"Tindal's making the running to some tune," said the Squire. "By Jove, Eric, if they do not hurry up they'll never catch him."

"Six furlongs to go yet, uncle," said Eric. "Primrose must be tiring, and Cannon Ball is going well in the field. Findon is riding him

comfortably. Look through my glasses, they are very powerful."

He handed his glasses to the Squire, who eagerly looked at the race.

"Cannon Ball's going strong, as you say, Eric, but he's an awful lot of ground to make up in that distance."

"They will not make up so much ground," said Eric. "Primrose will go back to them."

Ned Caunton was watching the race closely.

"I never thought Primrose could last out at that pace," he said to himself. "Tindal is trying to win, and also to steal a march on them. Findon can't leave the others yet. He must wait for Primrose to come back. If he made his run now he'd be beaten."

Primrose at the Rifle Butts leading the Leger field by many lengths was a sight not often seen in this race.

People were amazed, and commenced to think that after all it might be possible for the horse to make his own running and win.

"They'll never catch him." "What a lead he has." "Why don't they come up to him?" "Where's the favourite?" "Orlando's going well."

Such were a few of the scores of comments passed as the race progressed.

On came Primrose, and showed but little sign of faltering. The field, however, was gradually gaining on the leader.

Findon glanced ahead, and thought it high time he made a move.

The riders of Orlando II. and Nobleman were watching Findon. They knew Primrose was making the pace for Cannon Ball, and any move on Findon's part would at once tell whether he thought the leader would come back to them.

Findon knew as well as the other jockeys that they were watching him, and it made him very cautious. He had been told to ride his own race. His judgment was relied on, and he meant to do his level best to win.

But his heart failed him when he saw the lead Primrose had obtained.

He had been assured Cannon Ball could stay the distance, and therefore he ought to go on.

But Findon also felt that Cannon Ball was not going too strong. He dare not make his run yet. He must wait and see if Primrose faltered.

The rider on Orlando II. seeing Findon still made no move, felt it was time he pushed his mount along, as he would have no chance with the leader, whatever Cannon Ball might have.

Accordingly he let Orlando II. out, and broke the compact mass in which they had been running.

The signal was now given. If Orlando II. went in chase of the leader, it was time the others did, and the riders made a forward movement.

Findon could not remain behind, and he sent Cannon Ball along in the wake of Orlando II.

It was a most exciting and unusual race.

Exciting because Primrose had such a lead, and every eye was fixed upon him to see if he would falter.

Exciting because the backers of every other horse in the race had to measure up their favourite's chance of beating the leader, and then when that was accomplished gauge whether the effort had beaten him.

"Primrose will win," said Nora. "I don't know whether to be glad or sorry."

"I shall win the Leger, Eric," said the Squire. "But I wish it had been with Cannon Ball and the old jacket."

"The Squire's won," said the vicar, excitedly, to Ruth.

"But I am afraid with the wrong horse," she answered.

"What a scene," exclaimed the vicar. "If I could only hold an audience spellbound like this! I am afraid no eloquence, however wonderful, could do it."

He looked at that vast multitude and wondered.

This field of a dozen horses held them entranced. So intense was the excitement that it could not find vent in words, or shouts, it seemed to be suppressed by some unseen overwhelming force.

"Wonderful," he thought. "What a marvellous sight. Thousands of people bursting with excitement which cannot break forth."

But it broke forth at last, with an explosion almost deafening.

"Primrose wins."

Thousands upon thousands of sturdy Yorkshire men shouted it at the top of their voices, backed up by powerful lungs.

The Magpie Jacket was in the lead yet, and the race seemed over.

Orlando II. was making a desperate effort to catch Primrose.

Nobleman was being ridden hard, and Findon was driving Cannon Ball along at a terrific rate.

"Old Ned was right," thought Findon. "He'll stay the distance, but can I catch Primrose, I'll try hard."

He set his teeth and rode Cannon Ball for all he was worth.

Nearer and nearer came the winning post.

The roar of the crowd could now be plainly heard. It excited both riders and horses. It seemed to encourage them to fresh exertions, to struggle on desperately to the end.

Squire Arden became calmer as the critical moment drew near. To Eric he seemed unnaturally calm, and he wondered at it, but he had not time to speak.

Gradually Primrose fell back, but it was doubtful even yet whether the others would catch him.

Orlando II. failed at the critical pinch, and now Cannon Ball ran into second position to his stable-mate. The Magpie Jackets were in front, but the one with the white cap, the second colours of the Squire, still led, the black cap on the favourite was in the second place.

It was a terribly exciting finish, fought out between two good horses, the property of one owner. It reminded old stagers of the fight between Marie Stuart and Doncaster.

Tindal strained every nerve to win on Primrose, and Findon was equally alert on Cannon Ball.

The favourite got on terms with his stable-mate, and the crowd roared with delight.

"The favourite wins," was now the cry.

"Cannon Ball." "Cannon Ball."

The judge's box was close at hand, a few more strides and all would be over.

Gallantly Primrose fought out the struggle to the bitter end, but his exertions in making the running had told upon him.

Cannon Ball came at a great pace in the last hundred yards, and Findon saw with delight he had the measure of Primrose.

Cannon Ball now had his head in front, the black cap danced in front of the white.

In an instant the favourite drew clear of Primrose, and as they passed the judge's box a wild shout of exultation proclaimed the favourite had won.

Cannon Ball had beaten Primrose by a length, Orlando II. was third, and Squire Arden had run first and second for the St. Leger.

"Go down and lead him in, uncle," said Eric. "What a win. First and second, and Cannon Ball won."

"The Magpie Jacket did it," said the Squire. "I felt there was luck in that jacket."

He went to lead in his horse, and worked his way with the assistance of Eric through the excited crowd.



Findon rode Cannon Ball in, and the jockey was proud of his victory.

Tindal followed on Primrose, and the cheering was deafening as the two Magpie Jackets came in.

When Squire Arden took hold of Cannon Ball's bridle, the roar from the crowd could have been heard a mile away.

It was a hearty Yorkshire reception given to a popular man.

"Bravo, Squire. Well done," shouted a hundred voices.

"Glad to see the old Magpie Jacket in front again," said one bluff old farmer.

Findon weighed in correctly, and Cannon Ball's victory was beyond the shadow of doubt.

As Nora came up to the Squire he thought of his dream the evening before, and he could not refrain from kissing her.

Another cheer went up as the people around saw Nora Norton meet the Squire.

"I am so pleased for your sake," she said.

"I know you are, my dear," said the Squire. "It is a glorious win."

The Vicar of Arden was delighted. He would not have missed the scene for anything.

"I feel jubilant enough to send off a wire telling them to ring the bells at Arden," he said.

"Don't," said the Squire. "The telegram might be given in evidence against you, Harry. Besides they will ring the bells without

awaiting your instructions when they hear the news."

"Do you really think so?" inquire the vicar.  
"What on earth will the bishop say?"

Ned Caunton was vastly pleased. He was congratulated on all sides, although the fashionable trainers rather held aloof. They were not at all pleased that two colts trained in private should run first and second in the St. Leger.

"You rode a fine race, Findon," said Ned;  
"but you might have come on a bit sooner. It was touch and go at the finish."

"Primrose would have won if he had not forced the pace," said Tindal.

"You are wrong there," said Ned. "I do not think he would have been placed if he had not made the running."

"You made the best of your way home," said Findon.

"I did," replied Tindal. "Beggar me, Fin, if I didn't think I should beat you."

Eric saw Ned Caunton, who said he could manage very well with the lads to bring the colts home. This being so Eric decided to return by the special with the Arden Hall party.

They arrived safely at Newark, where the brake was waiting for them, and drove straight to Arden Hall. As they passed along the street the Squire was recognised, and hearty congratulations were waved to him.

It was easy to see the win had been popular at Newark.

At the Ram Hotel a black-and-white flag floated out of one of the windows, and the crowd collected in the archway gave the Squire a hearty cheer.

The coachman had called there on his way to the station and given them the time of arrival of the special.

As they drew near to Arden, a faint sound could be heard borne on the evening breeze.

"What's that?" asked the vicar.

The Squire gave a hearty laugh.

"Come, Henry, I was right after all. I fancy those are the Arden church bells pealing. You're in for it now," he said.

"How dare they"—fumed the vicar—"how dare they ring the bells without my authority!"

"They had much better ring them on this occasion without your authority than with it. You are exonerated entirely," said the Squire.

When the brake drew up at the Hall entrance, the church bells could be heard pealing merrily.

The servants were assembled in the porch and, led by the old butler, they gave the Squire three hearty cheers.

It was a joyous home-coming, and the Squire was touched by it.

"Vicar, you must forgive them ringing the bells," said the Squire. "I will send round at once and tell them to cease. They mean no harm, and it has afforded them pleasure to give me what I am sure you will agree was an honest, hearty welcome home."

"Who can resist you, William?" said the vicar. "I need more forgiveness than they do. I ought not to have gone to Doncaster."

"That must not trouble you, Henry," said the Squire. "Stay and dine with us."

"Thank you," said the vicar. "I dare not face Mrs. Barnett at present after what has happened. She will be horrified."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A RAILWAY ADVENTURE.

THE result of the St. Leger was disastrous to Hector Norton. Through his own obstinacy he had lost money. He knew very well he ought to have backed Cannon Ball and saved his money on Primrose; but this fact only served to increase his bad temper. Had Primrose won he would have landed a good stake. As it was, he came out on the race several hundreds in debt.

Hector Norton walked to the station in a very bad humour. He was in the mood to quarrel with anyone, and the champagne he had taken after the race had done him considerably more harm than good.

The railway platform was crowded as he waited for the southern train. When it drew up he struggled fiercely in the crowd, and managed to secure a seat in a first-class compartment.

When he looked round to see who his companions were he recognised three well-known book-makers, and, strange to say, Sirius Cohen was in the same carriage.

No sooner was the train fairly going than a game at nap was proposed, and Hector joined in. Sirius Cohen was in a good humour. He had won money over Cannon Ball, and was inclined to be genial, although he had not forgotten what he heard about the firm of Norton and Son.

"What sort of a day did you have?" he asked Hector.

"Bad. If Primrose had won I should have been all right."

"I backed Cannon Ball at the finish, and managed to lay some of my Primrose money off," said Sirius.

"Lucky for you," replied Hector. "What induced you to back Cannon Ball again?"

"I heard something," said Sirius. "If you hadn't been such an obstinate beggar I'd have told you about it."

"I'm no more obstinate than you are," said Hector. "If it hadn't been for your infernal temper Ned Caunton would have told us all about the colt at the Salutation."

"Confound the luck!" said Sirius. "Fancy a man having the nine of diamonds left to 'cop' my eight with. There's a beautiful hand to get done on. Ace, queen, knave, and two more trumps, and I'm beaten."

"Don't grumble, Sirius," said one of the players. "Your luck's not often so bad."

"His luck, indeed!" said Hector. "What about mine. I have not had a call yet. Curse such cards!"

And he flung them down angrily.

"You'll have to change at Retford," said Sirus, as he shuffled the cards. "This train don't stop at Newark."

"Yes, it does," said Hector.

"You sit still at Retford," said Sirus, "and I'll bet you a fiver you go on to Grantham."

"Bosh!" said Hector. "But you must know, because you always bet on a certainty. Any of you fellows got a flask? I'm dry."

Paddy Cain, a jocular little Irish bookmaker, pulled out a flask and said:

"Here's some Irish, my boy, if you care to have a pull at it."

Hector took the flask, half filled the cup, and drained it off.

"That's better," he said, as he picked up his hand. "By Jove! it brought me luck. Here goes for 'nap'."

Hector put down the ace of hearts, followed it with the king, queen, and ten, and scored four tricks.

"I'll bet you a pound you don't win," said Sirus, who sat next to him.

"Done," said Hector, as he put down the king of clubs.

Sirus banged down the ace of clubs on to the king and shouted:

"That's good. I lost on a better hand than that."

Hector lost his temper.

"You looked at my hand," he said, savagely, to Sirus.

"That's a lie," said Sirus.

"Hold on. No rows here," chimed in Paddy Cain.

"He must have seen what I had left," said Hector, "or he would not have bet a sov. He saw I had the king, and he held the ace; so he knew it was a certainty for him. Didn't I tell you he always bet on certainties. Bah! I'm full of it," said Hector, as he pushed the cards away.

"Always bet on certainties, do I?" said Sirus. "Now look here, Norton, I've had enough of your insults. You're a darned sight too free with your tongue. I did not look at the card you held. I had the ace of clubs, and I'm always willing to back an ace for a pound any time in the last round."

"I say you looked at my card," said Hector; "and I shall not play again."

Sirus Cohen became angry. He had not looked at Hector's card.

"I don't rob people," said Sirus. "I can pay my debts, and I would not look at your cards for a paltry quid."

"If you would not look for a pound, how much would you look for?" said Hector.

"I play fair," said Sirus. "You've no occasion to talk about fair play. How about that money you borrowed this morning? You knew you would not be able to pay it back when you got it."

"You infernal scoundrel, what do you mean?" said Hector, who was not as sober as he might have been.



"You're the scoundrel," said Sirius. "Keep your nice names for yourself. I say you knew you would not be able to pay me when you borrowed the money. If that's not roguery, what is?"

"Do be quiet," said Paddy Cain. "Can't you see he's a bit on, Cohen. Let it drop."

"But I shall not let it drop," shouted Hector, "until he tells me what he is hinting at."

"I'll tell you, quick enough," said Sirius. "You needn't crack you don't know about it. Oh, you're a very innocent young man, you are. What do you think he did?" asked Sirius, turning to the others.

"He had me for fifty ready. He gave me a bill, and it's not worth the paper it's written on. He owes me a lot of money. I'd not have minded that if he acted square by me; but when he borrows fifty ready, knowing he's dead broke, I call that robbery."

Hector Norton was now in a towering passion. He seized Sirius by the collar of his coat, and pulled him out of his seat.

"If you don't retract all you have said, I'll throw you out of the window.

The others saw it was time to interfere, and separated the pair.

"I'll have the law on you for this," shouted Sirius. "It's an assault, that's what it is. An unprovoked assault."

"Not quite unprovoked, Sirius," said Paddy Cain. "You riled him a good bit."

"I spoke the truth," said Sirus. "I tell you he borrowed fifty ready from me, and he knew at the time the firm was broke, and that he couldn't pay me."

"What firm's gone," asked Hector.

"Oh, you know well enough," said Sirus. "I mean the firm of Norton and Son, of Nottingham. You're the precious son, I believe."

Hector Norton glared at him, too astounded to speak.

"It may be true," something seemed to whisper to him.

"I'll make you suffer for this, Cohen," said Hector. "It's a serious matter to make a statement like that in a railway carriage full of people."

"It's true," said Sirus. "I heard the firm was shaky not ten minutes after I lent you the money this morning."

"And I tell you it's not true," said Hector.

The shock of hearing such news, which he half believed, sobered him, and made him quiet.

"I hope it is not true for your sake, Mr. Norton," said Paddy Cain, "but I heard a rumour myself about it."

"Then the man circulating such lies will have to suffer for it," said Hector. "I should advise you not to repeat it, Cohen."

"I shall please myself about that," said Sirus. "You must know about it."

"I tell you it's all a trumped-up thing," said Hector. "The governor has heaps of money."

"He's no more than you have, if my information's correct," said Cohen. "Ask him yourself."

"I shall tell him what you have said," remarked Hector, "and I fancy you'll wish you had held your tongue."

"You're carrying it off with a high hand," said Sirus. "If you had not accused me of cheating I should have said nothing about it."

"I accused you of looking at my card," said Hector, "and I believe you did look."

"Oh! hang it all, drop it," said Paddy Cain. "Where are we? Bless me, it's Retford," he said, as the train drew up.

"You'd better change here, Mr. Norton," said Paddy.

"The train stops at Newark. They told me so at Doncaster," said Hector.

"Then they told you wrong," said Sirus.

Paddy Cain put his head out of the window, and called a porter.

"Does this train stop at Newark?"

"No, sir."

The train had commenced to move.

When Hector Norton heard the porter's reply, he seized his handbag and umbrella, and made a dive for the door.

The porter banged it to, and said:

"You can't get out now, sir. It's dangerous. Go on to Grantham."

"I'll see you — first," said Hector. "I'm not going to be shut up here with a beastly cad like Cohen all the way to Grantham."

Before Cohen had time to reply Hector pushed the porter's arm away, and turned the door handle.

The carriage was now past the end of the platform.

"Stop him," shouted Paddy Cain. "You young fool, you'll kill yourself."

He made a dive at Hector's coat, but was too late.

The carriage door flew wide open, and Hector Norton fell out.

"He's done it now," said Paddy, as he looked out.

"He's lying quite still. The porter's run up to him. He's moving. What a blessing he's not killed."

"Shut the door, the young idiot's all right," growled Cohen. "Serves him right, he should keep a civil tongue in his head."

Hector Norton had a bad fall.

When the porter reached him he said:

"It's a lucky thing for you, sir, you were not killed. I tried to keep you in the carriage."

"It's not your fault," groaned Hector. "Take care, my left arm's smashed, I think."

With the assistance of the porter Hector Norton scrambled to his feet.

He could not walk, his left ankle was broken.

"You'll not be able to go on to Newark to-night," said the porter.

"I must," said Hector.

He was helped to the waiting-room, and a doctor sent for.

When the doctor saw him, he at once said Hector must not go on to Newark.

"I have met you in the hunting field, Mr. Norton," he said.

"I thought I had seen you before," said Hector. "Is it very bad, Dr. Morris?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "You've broken your arm in two places, and your ankle is broken. Come to my house, that will be best for you. My housekeeper will soon get a room ready for you."

"You are very kind," said Hector. "I am afraid I am giving you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all," said Dr. Morris.

Hector Norton was conveyed to the doctor's house, and a telegram despatched to Beechwood stating that he had met with an accident, but not of a serious nature."

"That will not alarm them," said Dr. Morris. "It will explain your absence, and I will write to-night and state what has happened."

"Many thanks," said Hector.

When Dr. Morris's note reached Beechwood Mrs. Norton and Nora decided to go to Retford at once to see Hector.

"It must be a very bad accident or he would have come home," said Mrs. Norton. "What trouble we are in to be sure."

Mrs. Norton and Nora found Hector was as comfortable as he could possibly be under the circumstances.

There was, however, no chance of his being

moved for a week or more, so Nora decided to remain with him, and Mrs. Norton returned home.

"Tell me how it all happened," said Nora.

"I fell out of the carriage door," said Hector. "The train was on the move when I found out it did not stop at Newark."

"When are you to be married, Nora?" asked Hector.

"Next week," she replied. "Eric and the Squire are both anxious for the wedding to take place then."

"I can't go," said Hector.

"I'm very sorry," said Nora.

"You need not be, Nora," he said. "I'm a bad lot."

"That I'm am sure you are not," she replied. "You may have gone wrong, Hector, but you are not bad at heart."

"You don't know all," he said. "If you did you would not speak to me."

"How can you say so, Hector?" she replied. "I am too fond of you to let anything come between us."

"You're a good girl, Nora," he said "and Eric is lucky to get you for a wife. I hope you will be happy."

"I am sure we shall," said Nora. "And, Hector, you must try and be good friends with Eric."

"I'm afraid he will not want to be good friends with me," replied Hector. "We shall see,

Nora. Perhaps I can do something to heal the breach between us. He's a good fellow, Nora, a much better man than I am."

"If you had the chance I am sure you would prove yourself to be all I think you," said Nora. "You have been spoiled, Hector. If you had to work hard, I am sure you would be all the better for it."

"What makes you say that?" asked Hector. "Shall I have to work hard, do you think?"

"You may have to do so," she replied, "We never can tell what may happen."

He thought of Sirius Cohen's words about Norton and Son, and felt uneasy.

When Hector Norton reached Beechwood his father welcomed him more warmly than usual.

"You must get well as soon as you can," said Mr. Norton. "I shall want you."

"What for?" asked Hector.

"To work, my lad. Things are in a bad way with us. We shall have a hard job to pull through."

"Then the firm's not gone yet?" said Hector.

"No, but it's almost as good as gone," said Mr. Norton. "We must try our best. We can do no more."

"I've not been a good son, governor," said Hector; "but I'll try and make amends."

"Perhaps it's been my fault, Hector," said Mr. Norton. "You've had too much of your own way. I ought to have pulled you up before."

"And what about Amy Jackson?" asked Hector.

"We will talk of that when you are well again," said Mr Norton.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A FRIEND IN NEED.

NORTON AND SON were in serious difficulties. There was no disguising the fact. If Robert Norton could not manage to get ten thousand pounds within a week the firm would go.

"Never knew money so tight before," he groaned. "What on earth am I to do?"

"Is it as bad as this, governor?" said Hector.

"Yes, my boy, it is. Smash is the only word for it."

"I'm awfully sorry. I ought to have helped you more," said Hector. "All we can do is to make a fresh start on the remains of the wreck."

"There will be deuced little left, I'm afraid, Hector. All my specs have gone wrong. I can't make it out. There's been the deuce to pay ately. If I could only get hold of ten thousand we should pull through, and, besides that, we should make a fortune. We have a couple of splendid contracts on hand, and the people who come down on us will reap the benefit. It's

terrible hard luck. I've tried hard to get the money, but it's no go."

Mrs. Norton confided in Nora. She felt Nora was the only one she could pour out her troubles to.

"I must tell Eric," said Nora, sadly. "It will not be fair to him not to know before—before ——"

"Nora, dear," said her mother, "you are quite right; he ought to know. But it will make no difference to him. He is a manly fellow and he loves you, Nora. It is yourself he wants, not money. I fancy he will be rather pleased you are poor."

Mrs. Norton kissed her daughter fondly.

"You had better tell him at once, Nora. We will call this afternoon."

"You are very good, mother. How does father take it?"

"Better than I expected. We shall have to leave Beechwood."

"I am very sorry for you, mother, and I love Beechwood," said Nora.

"Don't be sorry for me, Nora. To tell you the honest truth, I have never been happy here. Beechwood's too much for me. It smothers me, Nora, I can't carry the load."

"I am sure you have done very well, mother. Everyone respects you. It will be a pity to leave Beechwood."

Mrs. Norton and Nora drove to Arden Hall in the afternoon.

"I am afraid we shall not be able to drive in a carriage much longer," said Mrs Norton, with a sigh. She really liked her carriage. It was such a comfort to be able to drive about from place to place.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Mrs. Fairfield, as she greeted them. Eric and Nora went out on to the terrace. The Squire was taking his afternoon doze.

"Eric, I have some bad news to tell you," she commenced falteringly.

"Is Hector worse?" he asked.

"He is much better, I am glad to say," replied Nora. "It is about business I wish to speak to you."

"How can any business but the all important one of our marriage affect me," said Eric, with a smile.

"I am afraid father is in serious difficulties," said Nora.

Eric remembered he had heard Norton and Son were shaky.

He looked serious, as he replied :

"I hope it is not *very* bad, Nora."

"Oh, but it is, Eric. It could not be worse. Mother told me everything this morning, and I felt I must tell you at once before we were married."

"Whatever happens to your father it could make no possible difference to our marriage, Nora."

She looked up into his face with a smile of happiness, although her eyes were dim with tears.

"I could not let you marry me under false pretences, Eric," she said. "I could not bear to think you had been deceived."

"You're a dear good girl, Nora" he said, bending down and kissing her. "The best little woman in the world. You are much too good for me. You are not deceiving me. You are incapable of deceit, Nora. I know your father is not as well off as he was a year or two back, he has had heavy losses. I knew this before you did, Nora. Could you for one moment doubt me and think I was mercenary. I want you, Nora—you alone."

"No, Eric, I never doubted you," she said; "but it was only right you should know. It might have been said the marriage had been hurried on so that there could be no drawing back."

"I should like to see the person who would say such a thing in my presence," said Eric quickly. "You must not let such things trouble you, Nora."

"Who is that coming up the drive, Eric?" asked Nora.

"It's a messenger from the telegraph office. I wonder what he wants, or rather, what news he brings."

"Good news I hope," said Nora. "We have had nothing but bad news at Beechwood lately. I am commencing to be afraid of a telegraph boy."

In a few minutes Mrs. Fairfield came out.

"Eric, your uncle wants you. He says it is most important. You had better go to him at once. I am sure Nora will excuse you."

Eric ran into the house, and went to his uncle's room.

He found the Squire pacing about, and in an excited state.

"Eric, my lad, we're in luck again. It's that Magpie Jacket. I only put it back in its place again to-day, and I thought as I fastened it in the frame something would turn up. Something has turned up. By Jove, I never felt so pleased. It's wonderful, and I thought all the money was gone."

"What money?" said Eric, bewildered.

"The money I put into those blessed mines in Coolgardie," said the Squire. "Oh! I forgot you didn't know how much I had in them. Well, it was a heap, Eric. More than I ought to have risked. But read that, my lad. Read it. I want your advice."

Eric took the telegram and read:

"Will you sell your shares in the No. 1 Great Barrier mine, Coolgardie. Lord Farfar offers fifty thousand, cash. Should advise you to accept. It will save you further trouble and it is a fair offer."

The telegram was signed Bolter and Swallow.

Eric could hardly believe his eyes.

Fifty thousand," he gasped.

"I have ten thousand in the concern," said the Squire. "Forty thousand clear profit. That's not a bad deal for an old man, eh, Eric?"

"You astonish me, uncle. I hardly know what to say."

"You can't be more astonished than I am," said the Squire." "I thought my money was gone. What a slice of luck."

"Shall you accept the offer?" asked Eric.

"I shall," said the Squire, "and no more mines for me. I hope Farfar makes another fifty thousand out of it."

Eric looked embarrassed.

"What's the matter, my boy?" said the Squire. "Are you upset?"

"I'm in an awkward fix," said Eric.

"How's that?"

"I have something to tell you, something Nora has just told me, and now I hardly like to name it. It looks like making a suggestion to you."

"Out with it. You are not accustomed to beating about the bush," said the Squire. "What is it? I'm all attention. Bolter and Swallow can wait a bit for my reply. It will do them good. They'll be in a perfect fever to have my reply, and know whether they will get a good commission."

Then Eric told him all Nora had said, and how the firm of Norton and Son were in difficulties, and, not expected to weather the storm. He also told the Squire why Nora had made the communication to him.

"Eric that girl's one in a thousand. Go and bring her here. I want to see her," said the Squire.

"Nora, my uncle wishes to see you," said Eric.

She accompanied him to the Squire's room.

Squire Arden kissed her fondly, and then startled both Eric and Nora by saying :

"I want to see your father, Nora. Do you think he will call?"

"Nora could not reply for a few moments. What did it all mean? Mr. Arden asking her father to call. It was too good to be true.

"I am sure he will be only too pleased," she faltered.

"And I'm not sure of anything of the sort," blurted out the Squire. "I want to see him on particular business. Eric drive back with Mrs. Norton and Nora, and don't come back without him. I generally manage to have my own way, and I want to see P—— I mean Robert Norton."

"Hang it all I nearly said 'Peg.' That would have spoilt the whole affair," thought the Squire.

"What does it all mean," asked Nora as they drove back to Beechwood.

Eric had a shrewd suspicion, but he thought it better to remain silent.

"I do hope Bob will go," said Mrs. Norton. "But he's very obstinate."

Eric smiled. He thought Robert Norton would quickly decide to go to Arden Hall.

Such proved to be the case.

"Go. Of course I'll go," said Robert Norton, when he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise. "What on earth can he want with me? He can't be short of money."

The idea of any man wanting to borrow money from him at the present time made Mr. Norton smile grimly.

He hardly knew where the next week's wages were to come from to pay the employees of Norton and Son.

He drove back with Eric.

"What can he want with me?" he asked.

"I am sure I don't know," said Eric, with a laugh; "but he packed us off in a hurry to fetch you."

"I fancied he hated the mere mention of my name," said Mr. Norton.

"A mistake, I assure you," said Eric. "The Squire hates no one, Mr. Norton."

"I don't believe he does. Here we are. I really don't know what to say to him," said Mr. Norton.

When Robert Norton entered the Squire's room the two men stood and looked at each other for a moment. Then Squire Arden said—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Norton. In future I hope we shall be better neighbours."

"I hope so, Mr. Arden," said Robert Norton. "I am sure we owe you an apology for that affair over Hiram Jackson."

"That is over," said the Squire. "We will say no more about it. You were not to blame at all events. Read that telegram, Mr. Norton."

Robert Norton was surprised, as well he might be, at such a request from the Squire.

"He must be in some mess or other," thought Mr. Norton.

When he read the telegram he gasped.

"Fifty thousand pounds! Good heavens! it's a fortune, Squire," he exclaimed.



"Not to such a man as yourself," said Squire Arden; "but it means a good deal to me."

"It would mean a vast deal more to me at the present time," said Mr. Norton.

"What do you mean?" asked the Squire.

"To use a slang expression, Norton and Son's in Queer Street," said Robert Norton, with a feeble attempt to smile.

"I knew it," was the unexpected reply of the Squire. "That's why I sent for you."

"Indeed," said Mr. Norton, surprised beyond measure.

"How the deuce has he heard of it?" he thought.

"Your daughter is to marry my nephew," said the Squire.

"Oh! that's it," thought Robert Norton; "he wants to back out of it."

"I love that girl as a daughter," said the Squire; "and Eric has always stood in place of a son to me."

Robert Norton was bewildered again.

If Squire Arden loved them, why should he wish to separate them?

"Are you in very low water?" asked the Squire.

Robert Norton hesitated. He hardly liked the question.

"What ever you tell me I need hardly say shall go no farther," said the Squire.

Robert Norton considered it was best to be frank with the Squire, and he placed the whole facts before him.

"And ten thousand pounds will pull you through. You can complete your contracts, and go on with the business if that amount is advanced?" asked the Squire.

"I'm certain of it," said Robert Norton. "But I cannot get the money. Heaven knows, I've tried hard enough."

Squire Arden took a telegraph form and wrote :

"Accept Lord Farfar's offer. Ten thousand cash by Saturday to bind the bargain."

"Read that," he said, as he handed it to Robert Norton.

"I see you want money as well as myself, Squire," said Mr. Norton, smiling.

"I do. I want ten thousand badly," said the Squire, with a humorous look at Robert Norton that made him start.

"Do you know what I want the money for at once?"

"No," said Robert Norton, faintly.

"I want to set Norton and Son on their legs again," said the Squire. "I want to make Eric and Nora happy, and I think that will do it."

Robert Norton could not speak. He could not believe it true. Here was the man he had called hard names, and tried to annoy in many petty ways, actually saving him from ruin.

This was too much for Robert Norton. He had battled with a hard world from his youth upwards, and had met with no men of Squire Arden's stamp.

Robert Norton's silence was eloquent of his feelings, and Squire Arden understood it, and thought :

"There's a lot of good in him after all. It only wanted bringing out. I'm glad I've been the man to do it."

For fully five minutes Robert Norton did not speak. Then he raised his head, and in a broken voice said :

"Squire Arden, you've given me the hardest knock I ever had in my life, and I've had many. I won't mince matters with you. I've not always behaved straight towards you. You're a noble-hearted man. Will you let me take your hand?"

"There it is, Robert Norton," said the Squire. "Now say no more about it. The money is your's until you can repay it. Try some of my old port. The vicar says it's good, and he's a judge, you know."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE CRASH AVERTED.

NORTON AND SON were saved. The firm, much to the surprise of those most interested, met its liabilities.

Where the money came from was a mystery, but the solid cash spoke for itself. There could be no doubt about that.

The wedding took place at Arden church, the vicar performing the ceremony, and Eric Fairfield and Nora Norton were man and wife.

It was a quiet wedding, although the church was crowded with the villagers, and a number of the best county people were present.

Happy is the bride the sun shines on, and it could not have been a more favourable day.

Nora Norton looked charming — a picture of happiness—and Eric was very proud of his beautiful wife.

Squire Arden was supremely happy. He knew he had done the right thing in lending Robert Norton the money to tide over his difficulties.

Hector Norton was even more surprised than his father when he heard what Mr. Arden had done.

"I should never have thought it of him," said Hector. "It makes a fellow seem very small. I wish I could get about again. I'm bored to death lying here helpless."

"You will have to take your time, my boy," said his father. "Broken arms and ankles take a lot of mending. What are you going to do about Amy Jackson?"

"Whatever you wish," said Hector, wearily.

"The best thing you can do is to marry her quietly, and go abroad for a couple of years. I shall be able to manage that for you. Of course, you know Beechwood will have to come under the hammer. The place is heavily mortgaged. It took all the money Squire Arden advanced to keep the firm going. In a few years we shall have pulled round, but it is no use trying to keep Beechwood on. We made a false start, Hector. Sticking to business is the only thing to pull us round."

Hector Norton gradually regained his strength.

When he was able to go out, he went to Hiram Jackson and confessed he was sorry for the wrong he had done him and also his daughter.

"I am willing to make all the amends in my power, Jackson," he said. "My father suggests that when Amy and I are married we should go abroad for a couple of years."

"Then you will marry Amy?" said Hiram Jackson, eagerly.

"Yes," said Hector. "It must be a quiet wedding—somewhere in London—and we can go on to the Continent for a time, and then perhaps

to the colonies. It will be the best way, Jackson. We are leaving Beechwood."

"So your father's going to sell out, is he?" said Hiram. "You're not ashamed of Amy, I hope. She's too good for you, Hector Norton. I don't envy her, but the lass loves you. Mind you treat her fairly, or, by God, I'll follow you to the end of the world to pay you out."

Hector Norton was nettled at Hiram's remarks. He was not man enough to acknowledge he married Amy because he was in honour bound to do so. He wished Jackson to understand it was a great condescension on his part, but Hiram naturally refused to regard it in that light.

"If you try to bully me into it," said Hector, "I'll not marry her at all."

"You will marry her," said Hiram, "or I'll know the reason why."

"Haven't I told you I will marry her?" said Hector.

"If you take her away to London, how do I know you will act squarely by her?" said Hiram. "You deceived her once, you might do so again. If your father trusts you it's more than I do. There's not much of the man about you, Hector Norton."

Hiram Jackson was not doing his daughter's cause any good by bandying words with Hector Norton. The man, however, was angry at the way in which Hector spoke, and, knowing he had him to a certain extent in his power, did not spare him.

"It's not much use talking to you," said Hector; "I will go and see Amy. She'll listen to reason."

"I must see her married to you," said Hiram.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Hector.

"How am I to know you have married her?" said Hiram. "Will you let me have a copy of the certificate?"

"D—— you, yes," said Hector, angrily, "if nothing else will satisfy you."

"You've no occasion to swear at me," said Hiram. "I want justice for my lass. I don't care about myself. So long as you are married to her, I am satisfied. She's made her own bed, and she'll have to lie on it. I'm sorry for her, but it can't be helped."

Hector Norton saw Amy Jackson, and she agreed to meet him in London and to be married by special licence.

When Nora heard from Hector all he had done, she well understood how Eric had been cold towards him.

"You have behaved shamefully," said Nora, "but I am glad you are going to make amends. I hope you will be a good husband to her."

"I shall be as good as the ordinary run of husbands," he replied. "We are not all such perfect beings as Eric."

Hector Norton's repentant feelings had vanished with his illness, and he was again selfish and defiant.

"For shame, Hector," said Nora. "I am sorry for Amy, and I cannot tell you how sorry I am to have my faith in you shattered."

"I warned you, Nora," said Hector; "I told you I was a bad lot."

Mrs. Norton and his sisters at Beechwood were shocked to hear of Hector's misdeeds.

His mother sided with Mr. Norton, and urged him to marry Amy; but Ethel Norton set her face resolutely against it.

"It is sure to be made known," she said, "and we shall be the talk of the county. The girl has gone wrong; let her suffer for it."

"You are most unfeeling," said her mother. "What does it matter about the county people? We shall not be here long."

"What do you mean, mother?" said Ethel, alarmed.

"We shall not be at Beechwood much longer. Your father has to sell the property," said Mrs. Norton.

"Sell Beechwood?" said Ethel in amazement.

"Yes. It is heavily mortgaged. The money he had from Squire Arden all went into the business," said Mrs. Norton.

Ethel Norton's pride received a severe shock when she heard this news. She had held her head very high as Miss Norton—the rich Miss Norton of Beechwood.

She did not answer her mother, but swept out of the room.

Ethel Norton was a disappointed woman. She had refused to marry the man she loved because



he was poor and had only a moderate position in life, in the hopes of meeting with a more eligible partner. The eligible gentleman had not turned up, Miss Norton was no longer Miss Norton of Beechwood, and, worst of all, she was fast reaching the age when marriage becomes difficult. It was her pride she had considered before her happiness, and the result might have been anticipated.

Hector Norton went up to London, and Amy Jackson, with her son, followed him.

They were married, and Hiram Jackson in due course received a copy of the marriage certificate.

Hector and his wife went to Paris, and thence to Naples.

Amy soon discovered Hector cared very little about her; but for her child's sake she determined to smother her feelings."

Robert Norton gave Hector what ought to have been an ample allowance, but his gambling propensities were against him.

He lost his first instalment in a week, and wrote home for more.

Robert Norton sent him fifty pounds, and gave him to understand his line of conduct did not suit him.

Hector Norton went from bad to worse.

He looked upon his wife as the cause of all his trouble, and constantly upbraided her.

Amy bore it all patiently.

"Let us try the colonies," she said to Hector one day. "You will never be settled wandering about Naples."

"Can't get the money to go out with," said Hector.

"I am sure your father will pay our passages and give you enough to make a start with when we reach Australia," she replied.

"Then you had better write and ask him," said Hector. "If he'll pay our saloon passages and give me five hundred to start with, we will go."

Amy wrote to Robert Norton and stated what Hector had said.

"I'll do it," said Robert Norton; "but I shall pay the passages myself, and two hundred and fifty pounds out of the five hundred shall be given to his wife. I'll have two drafts made out, one for Hector, and one for Amy; and I'll allow him another fifty for the passage. That ought to suffice. The firm's going ahead again, thanks to Squire Arden."

When Hector heard of his father's decision he was very angry.

"I believe you asked him to give half the money to you," he said to Amy.

"I did no such thing," she replied. "You know very well I would not do it. I think your father acted wisely all the same."

"I'm glad to hear it," sneered Hector; "but mind, if I'm stumped you'll have to pay over the cash."

Amy did not answer him.

"Did you hear me?" he asked, savagely.

"I heard you, Hector."

"Well."

"I shall keep the money for our son."

"*Your* son," he said, brutally.

"How dare you," she said, angrily. "You are no man, Hector, to say such words to me."

He laughed bitterly.

"A nice mess you've made of my life," he said. "I wish I'd never seen you."

She left the room. She went to her child's bed and sobbed bitterly.

"I must bear it, for your sake, my darling," she sobbed; "but it is very hard."

"Is dat you, mammy?" said the child, half asleep.

"Yes, dear. Are you warm and snug?"

"I is, mammy. Oo tiss me. Dod bless oo; dood night."

She kissed the little one, and he was soon sound asleep.

Hector Norton and his wife started on their voyage.

In three weeks Hector had gambled away all his spare cash, and sold his draft for two hundred pounds cash, which he also lost.

Amy was firm, and would not part with her money.

He threatened and bullied, but all to no purpose.

Then he commenced drinking heavily.

"I'll run up a stiff bill, and she'll have to pay that," he chuckled to himself.

"I'm afraid I shall have to stop Mr. Norton's drink," said the captain to Amy.

"I wish you would do so at once," she replied.

"If he is not sober to-night I shall do so," he said.

Hector Norton was not sober. He was very intoxicated.

He turned into his bunk, and went to sleep.

In the morning he was nowhere to be found.

"He was in the cabin last night," said Amy, anxiously. "He must be hiding somewhere."

The captain looked serious. Search was made for him high and low, but he could not be found.

When the vessel reached Colombo the captain arranged for Amy Norton to return by a homeward bound steamer.

There could be no doubt about it, Hector Norton had fallen overboard, and Amy was left a widow.

It was a sad ending to a life that might have been promising had Hector Norton not given way to temptation.

Robert Norton took his son's death deeply to heart. He thought, with regret, he had not always set him a good example.

The firm still continued to be Norton and Son.

Beechwood was put up to auction, and Squire Arden bought it, and handed the title-deeds to Eric.

"Now you will have a home of your own," he said; "but I hope you will not entirely desert the Hall."

"That I am sure we shall not," said Eric. "Neither Nora nor myself wish that."

"No," said Nora. "Beechwood is so near, and I am afraid we shall often trespass on your hospitality."

"You must regard Arden Hall just as much your home as Beechwood," said the Squire. "I think your father is glad I bought it, Nora."

"I am sure he is," said Nora. "He will be pleased to visit us there, and see the old home again."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE PARSON'S WOOING.

MATRIMONY was evidently in the air at Arden.

Mrs. Barnett, the vicar's housekeeper, could not make out the Rev. Henry Burton at all.

When she discovered he had been to Doncaster to see the St. Leger run she was scandalised, and when the church bells were set ringing to celebrate the victory of Cannon Ball she thought the Arden people must have gone mad.

For the first time in her long reign at Arden Vicarage the vicar had rebelled against her rule.

She commenced to rate him soundly upon his conduct, and the Rev. Henry told her to mind her own business.

This so astonished her she could find no reply, and retired to her own quarters highly indignant.

The bishop made no sign, and the vicar came to the conclusion he had heard nothing about his expedition to Doncaster or of the ringing of the church bells.

As a matter of fact, the bishop knew all about it, but, acting upon advice, he had refrained from making any comments on the subject.

Mrs. Barnett saw there was a decided change in the vicar, and felt her authority was no longer paramount. After grave consideration she came to the conclusion he was in love and contemplated matrimony.

Entering his study one morning, she discovered a young lady's photograph on the mantelpiece.

This in itself was quite sufficient to give her a shock, but when she recognised the lady in the photograph she sat down with a gasp in the nearest chair, which happened to be the vicar's.

"Well, upon my word!" she said to herself. "Miss Ruth Caunton, the Squire's trainer's daughter. How did he come by that? She must have given it to him. It is positively shocking. He goes to the races, then he has the bells rung to celebrate a win, and now he has the photograph of the trainer's daughter in his study.

"How can he compose sermons with that girl's picture staring him in the face, reminding him of his iniquities? He ought to know better, he really ought. I wonder who he is going to marry? That's what's the matter with him; I know the symptoms. Poor Barnett had them badly before he married me. She'd not like to see that photo stuck up here, whoever she is."

It did not enter Mrs. Barnett's head for a moment that Ruth Caunton could be the lady the vicar had chosen to be his wife.

So absorbed was Mrs. Barnett in thinking over the changed aspect of affairs at the vicarage, and

in the contemplation of Ruth Caunton's photograph, that she did not hear the door open.

The Rev. Henry Burton stood for a moment contemplating her with a smile on his face.

He looked very happy, and had evidently received good news.

He coughed to attract Mrs. Barnett's attention, and she jumped up with a start.

"Do you admire that young lady very much?" he asked. "You were regarding her portrait earnestly."

"How he brazens it out!" thought Mrs. Barnett.

"It is Ruth Caunton, the daughter of Squire Arden's trainer," she said, in a tone of voice signifying "and it has no business here."

The vicar smiled as he thought to himself:

"I shall give her a shock presently."

Aloud he said:

"I think she is a most estimable young lady. I hope you will get on with her, Mrs. Barnett. I should be sorry to lose you after all these years."

"What on earth can he mean?" thought the astonished housekeeper.

"I have just left her," said the vicar, prolonging the agony.

"He's actually been flirting with her," thought Mrs. Barnett.

"We have had a most interesting conversation," he continued. "I have asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

Mrs. Barnett held up her hands in pious horror.



"You are going to marry Ruth Caunton?" she gasped.

"We have decided to enter the bonds of matrimony," said the vicar. "I am sure you will congratulate me, Mrs. Barnett, on obtaining so estimable a wife."

Mrs. Barnett was thoroughly upset. She replied, in a faltering manner:

"It is very sudden, sir. You have taken me quite unawares. I hope you will find her a suitable wife."

"I am quite certain of that," said the vicar. "Ruth desired me to say she hoped you would remain at the vicarage."

"You must give me time to consider, sir. It is all so sudden," said Mrs. Barnett.

"Naturally, you are a good deal upset," said the vicar. "Think the matter over calmly, Mrs. Barnett. I am sure you will arrive at a right decision. I need hardly say I have been much indebted to you for many years. You have done all in your power to make me comfortable. I see no reason why you should not remain—none in the least. I will consider you in every way, and I am sure Ruth will be grieved if you decide to go."

Mrs. Barnett thought the matter over, and came to the conclusion she should not be able to take second place at Arden Vicarage, and especially to Ruth Caunton.

She imparted her decision to the vicar, who did not look so overwhelmed by the intelligence as she thought he ought to have been.

"I am sorry you have decided to leave," he said. "I shall be happy to do all in my power to secure you another suitable situation."

"What a relief," he said to himself, when the housekeeper had retired. "I was afraid she would decide to remain. After her rule for ten years or more, it will be happiness indeed to have Ruth by my side."

"So you have done it?" said the Squire, when the vicar told him the news. "The double has come off—Cannon Ball and Ruth Caunton. I knew it would, and I shall give you a cheque, Henry, to refurnish the house. You're a sly rascal to go and appropriate the prettiest girl in your congregation. Talk about Church and Stage, this is going a step farther—Church and Turf. Dear me, what will the folk say?"

"It matters little to me what they say," said the vicar. "Ruth is a most estimable woman. She will make me an admirable wife. I think I am setting a good example by choosing a woman I love in preference to marrying for position."

"You are quite right," said Squire Arden. "I admire your pluck, Henry. Shall you ask the bishop to marry you? You can't very well perform the ceremony yourself."

"I think I shall ask his lordship to officiate," said the vicar. "I do not fancy he will raise any objection."

"Ask him," said the Squire. "I shall be anxious to hear his reply."

When it became generally known the vicar

of Arden was to marry Ruth Caunton, many people considered he was making a grave mistake.

Mrs. Barnett could not hold her peace, and spoke her mind freely on the subject. Mrs. Fairfield considered the vicar's choice admirable, and heartily congratulated Ruth.

"I am so glad you approve of it," said Ruth. "So many people think Henry is making a mistake, that I have had grave doubts whether I ought not to release him from his promise. Do you think his marriage with me will lessen his influence for good amongst the people of Arden?"

"Certainly not. It will strengthen it if anything. He had far better marry a native of Arden than introduce a stranger here."

"But think what he might have done," said Ruth. "He could have chosen a wife in his own station of life. Would not that have been better?"

"He has chosen you, dear," said Mrs. Fairfield. "That is sufficient. He has, in my opinion, done right. I am sure you will make him a good wife, Ruth."

"I shall strive to do so," she said. "He is a good, noble-hearted man, Mrs. Fairfield. Any woman would be honoured by the love of such a man."

"If these are your feelings, Ruth, I have no doubt of the result of your marriage. A woman to be happy in her married life ought always to be able to respect and honour her husband, as well as love him. Passion, Ruth, is often mistaken for love. If

all women would do as you are doing, and marry in the same spirit, there would be less unhappy unions. You can help the vicar in so many ways. All the villagers know and respect you. They know and honour your father, and they will consider that in taking you for his wife, the vicar has proved his devotion to the Arden people," said Mrs. Fairfield.

Ruth was much cheered by Mrs. Fairfield's words. She had not failed to hear some of the comments passed upon her intended marriage, and she commenced to doubt whether she had done right in accepting the vicar's offer.

It was not of herself she thought, but of him. Ruth had an unselfish nature, and her sole desire was to make her intended husband happy.

Ned Caunton was pleased at the match, and it somewhat amused him to think the Vicar of Arden should marry his daughter.

He thought Ruth a match fit for any man, and he had a great respect for the vicar.

"Parsons are not much in my line, Ruth," he said, "but the vicar is a real good sort. He's a man I like. He has the courage of his opinions, and that's more than most men have."

The Squire, true to his promise, gave the vicar a substantial cheque, and the house was thoroughly refurnished for the bride.

The wedding took place in Arden Church, and the bishop performed the ceremony.

His lordship had some misgivings at first as to whether this was the correct thing for him to do,

but when he considered the Vicar of Arden's great popularity in the county, he thought it policy to comply with his request.

After the wedding the vicar and his wife left for the continent to spend their honeymoon, and it was generally acknowledged they made a very handsome couple.

Eric Fairfield and his wife had taken up their residence at Beechwood, but not a day passed without Eric paying a visit to the Hall to see his uncle.

"The Southwell Hunt Club Meeting is on next week," he said to the Squire; "and I have entered Honeydrop for the Hunters' Plate. He ought to have a good chance."

"If he can get the course he ought to win," said the Squire. "I know he can stay the distance, but do you think he will clear the jumps?"

"Yes," said Eric. "I have been schooling him of late, and I shall ride him myself. Nora is anxious about it, but I tell her there is no danger."

"It will be a pleasant day's outing; I shall go," said the Squire.

"I entered Honeydrop in your name," said Eric. "So I will ride in the old colours."

"Quite right," said the Squire; "and I hope they will bring you luck. By-the-bye, Eric, I shall run nothing at Newmarket. Ned is disappointed, but I will keep both colts for next year. We can pick up a rich prize or two at Ascot or Goodwood if they go on all right."

"I think Primrose would have won the Cambridgeshire," said Eric. "But I know you are not partial to handicaps."

"No, I am not," said Squire Arden; "and now I have won the St. Leger I am satisfied. I have had a narrow squeak, Eric. I was in much lower water than you imagined when I said a good win was my last chance. Everything has turned out well. Even Robert Norton is fast making another fortune, and he says he shall be able to refund the ten thousand pounds in another twelve months. I have told him when he does so, it will still be in the family, for I intend to hand it over to you and Nora. It will come in handy, I am sure, for Beechwood takes keeping up."

"But you make me a handsome allowance without it," said Eric. "I really do not require it."

"My dear boy, it will be yours some day," said the Squire. "You will have Arden when I am gone, Eric. I cannot last many more years. I do not wish it. Promise me that you will reside at Arden Hall after me."

"I promise that readily, uncle," said Eric, "but I hope it will be many years before I have to leave Beechwood."

"I'm an old man, Eric," said the Squire, "but I feel hearty enough at present. There is no telling, however, when the old trees fall. I shall snap suddenly and be gone. It is better so, much better than lingering on with health and intellect impaired."

Nora and her husband were very happy at Beechwood, and Squire Arden was delighted to visit them in their own home.

Robert Norton had made ample provision for his son's wife, and she now resided at Arden.

Nora frequently called to see her, and they had several chats about the unfortunate Hector.

Hiram Jackson did not express much sorrow when he heard of Hector Norton's end. He knew Amy would be much better off without him, and he told her so.

"I hope I shall win the Hunters' Plate to-morrow, Nora," Eric said to his wife.

"I do not like the idea of your riding in races," said Nora, "but as you have set your mind on it, Eric, I hope you will win."

"Old Honeydrop is a pretty safe conveyance," said Eric. "I feel sure it will be all right."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE HUNTERS' PLATE.

THE Southwell Hunt Club meeting is a quiet, pleasant country gathering, and the sport as a rule is interesting, more especially to the local people.

Southwell is a quaint old town—city it must be termed, on account of the fine old minster there.

Southwell Minster is one of the finest old edifices in England, and its age is great.

The old-fashioned hostelries in the place are in keeping with the surroundings, and the Saracen's Head is perhaps the oldest of the lot.

The afternoon before the meeting Eric rode Honeydrop over to Southwell.

He enjoyed his ride immensely, and he never tired of the picturesque scenery surrounding Newark and Southwell.

Honeydrop was a quiet mount, and walked leisurely along the road.

Several people spoke to Eric as he rode down Castle Street, and enquired what chance he would have for the Hunters' Plate.

He replied that Honeydrop would, he thought, win, the only horse he feared being Lambkin, owned by that fine rider and sportsman, Mr. Rippon Brockton.



"Then you give Lambkin a chance?" said the host of the Ram Hotel. "I suppose Mr. Brockton will ride him?"

"Sure to," said Eric, "and you know what a fine horseman he is. There are not many gentlemen riders can give Mr. Brockton a start."

"I hope you'll beat him, Mr. Fairfield, because I mean to have a trifle on your mount," said the landlord.

Eric rode past the old castle, whose ruined, weather-beaten walls looked down upon the canal beneath, and the wide fields and Great North Road stretching away to Muskham, and on the left to Kelham.

Eric rode on past Kelham Hall, the fine mansion belonging to Mr. Manners-Sutton, and in an hour or so reached Southwell, and rode Honeydrop through the old-fashioned archway into the Saracen's Head Yard.

"I intend remaining for the night," he said to the landlord. "I thought it better to come over the afternoon before the meeting. It's a good twelve-mile ride from Arden."

"How's old Ned?" asked Bob Worsley, the landlord. "I have not seen him since he won the St. Leger. By Jove! that was a victory, Mr. Fairfield. I made a book for your pair and had a good win."

"Glad to hear it," said Eric. "I think most of the local people were on Cannon Ball."

"Every man I met in Newark weeks before the race insisted upon backing the pair coupled. I

laid it them in order to keep their custom. Then I backed them back, and commenced peppering the others. Young Norton, poor devil, backed Primrose with me. His fifty's gone, but I shall get over that."

"He was a reckless fellow," said Eric. "He had a good chance if he had not thrown it away."

"I am afraid he's not the only one in that respect," said Worsley. "I met Sirus Cohen at Nottingham, the other day. He regards Norton's death as a personal affront to himself. He says Norton jumped overboard in order to do him out of his money."

"Did Hector Norton owe Cohen much?" asked Eric.

"Several hundreds. Cohen swears he will make Robert Norton pay it."

"I fancy he will have some difficulty in doing that," said Eric, laughing. "Mr. Norton will hardly regard it in the same light as Cohen."

"Do you want to back your horse for the Hunters' Plate?" said Worsley. "I have a couple of hundred pound back on it."

"What odds?" asked Eric.

"Can't lay you more than two to one. It will be a small field. Not more than six runners, and Honeydrop is sure to be favourite."

"I think Lambkin will start favourite," said Eric.

"I've laid my money against him," said Worsley, "at evens."

"Then you can afford to lay me three to one?" said Eric.

"Can't do it, sir."

"Then I'll have a hundred to fifty," said Eric. "That is quite enough for me. I don't bet much."

"All the better for you, sir," said Worsley, with a laugh.

"Then you would sooner lay horses than back them?" asked Eric, with a smile.

"You bet I would," was the reply.

There was a good deal of local excitement over the Hunt Club Meeting, and opinions were rather evenly divided over the chances of Honeydrop and Lambkin for the Hunters' Plate.

"It was well known that Mr. Brockton was a far more experienced man in the saddle than Eric, and this told in favour of Lambkin."

The morning of the meeting was clear and bright, with a sensation of frost in the air.

Squire Arden drove to Southwell with Mrs. Fairfield and Nora.

He had not been in the ancient city since the Leger, and he was congratulated on all sides.

Southwell course is well adapted for a hunt club meeting, but it would hardly suit those who delight in five-furlong flutters.

There was a good attendance of country people, and from Newark, Nottingham, and Lincoln, special trains brought several enthusiastic racing men.

In the primitive paddock, a space railed in for the occasion, were several Nottingham bookmakers,

quite sufficient to meet the demands made upon them.

Eric had donned the magpie jacket, and came across to Nora and his mother.

"I hope you will win, Eric," said his mother.

"I hope he will not have a fall," said Nora. "I must go and see Honeydrop, and give him a word of advice. You know I had a long ride on him once, and he may remember me."

Eric laughed heartily, as he replied—

"You have not forgotten that ride, Nora. Do you recollect the scolding you got after it?"

"I do," she said, smiling. "But I did not deserve it."

"There's Honeydrop," said Eric; "the lad is walking him about."

Honeydrop was being quietly led round, and seemed to take all the noise and bustle as a matter of course.

"Go with Eric and look at him," said Mrs. Fairfield. "I shall be quite safe alone, I assure you. No one will run away with an old woman like me."

Eric looked at his mother, and thought—

"You are not so old as you try to make us believe, mother. You are a very charming woman."

Mrs. Fairfield did not look her age. She was a fine, handsome woman.

The Squire, Eric, and Nora, were looking at Honeydrop, when Sir William Singleton came up.

After the customary greetings, he said to Nora—

"Is your husband going to carry off the Plate, Mrs. Fairfield? He has a good mount at any rate."

"Old Honeydrop is a safe conveyance," said Eric, after his wife had expressed her faith in Eric's success. "He is the horse I rode in that memorable run when we lost the fox at the Mill."

"You don't say so," remarked Sir William. "I was awfully sorry not to be up at the finish. My horse fell lame, and I could not come up with my second mount in time. Of course, I could have had one of the whips' horses, but I never care to do my men out of a good run. I believe several horses fell lame in that run," he added, with a smile.

"That is too bad of you, Sir William," said Nora. "My horse fell lame, and I rode Honeydrop home."

"Then I think Honeydrop did both of you a good turn," said Sir William.

"He did," replied Eric. "He certainly assisted me materially in a little scheme I had on hand in which Nora and myself were concerned."

"Yes," said Nora. "I accepted him, Sir William, out of gratitude for lending me Honeydrop to ride home on. To have refused him after such self-denial as a walk of a dozen miles, would have been base ingratitude."

Sir William laughed.

"Squire," he said; "these young ones are too sharp for us. I am afraid we are getting rusty."

"Never mind the rust so long as we don't get crusty," said the Squire. "We are not like the Arden port. I'm afraid we don't improve with age, Sir William."

"I can answer for the port improving at all events," said Sir William.

"There goes the bell—I must be off," said Eric.

"I will hold your coat," said Nora. "I can take it back to the carriage."

"Thank you," said Eric, as he pulled off his overcoat. "I have weighed out all right."

He mounted Honeydrop, and as he settled himself in the saddle, Mr. Brockton rode past on his way out.

"So you're going to beat me to-day, Mr. Fairfield," he said. "Well, I shall give you a race for it. Lambkin is pretty well."

"I shall try and beat you," replied Eric, "but I know I have my work cut out."

There were six starters for the Hunters' Plate, distance about two and a half miles over hurdles.

Sir William Singleton's Latchkey, The Earl of Shrewsbury's Mordant, Capt. Beecher's Merry-maid, and Mr. C. J. Cunningham's Turk (ridden by his owner).

They were an even lot, and all of them were backed, but Lambkin was favourite, and Turk and Honeydrop were next in demand.

Merrymaid went away with the lead and cleared the first obstacle in front of Turk and Mordaunt, with Lambkin and Honeydrop in the rear.

All fenced well so far, but at the next hurdle Mordaunt fell.

For a mile Merrymaid led and then Turk passed him, Honeydrop following in the wake of Lambkin.

Eric knew he had a good pilot in front of him, and he knew if he kept close up with Lambkin he had a good chance.

"I can beat Brockton's horse in the run home," he thought.

At the hurdle rising the hill Merrymaid blundered, and in pulling out Lambkin to avoid a cannon, Brockton's horse crossed Honeydrop and caused him to make a false jump.

Honeydrop struck the fence heavily, and shot Eric forward, but he made a clever recovery, and received a round of applause as he passed the paddock.

The mishap had lost Honeydrop some ground, and Eric fancied the horse went a bit sore.

They were now half a mile from home, and Mr. Brockton was sending Lambkin along.

He caught Turk, and the pair were racing together well in front of Honeydrop.

"I'm afraid that blunder cost your horse the race," said Sir William to the Squire.

"I don't mind for myself," said the Squire; "but I should have liked Eric to win. It encourages these young fellows to win a hunters' race or two."

"He made a splendid recovery," said Sir William. "He is a fine rider. He's creeping up now, Squire. By Jove, he's got a chance yet."

They were over the last hurdle, and Nora gave a sigh of satisfaction as she saw Honeydrop clear it. She had received a shock when the horse struck heavily and nearly unseated Eric.

Lambkin had beaten Turk. Honeydrop had passed Turk and was fast overhauling Lambkin. It was a clinking finish, and at present it was a toss up which horse would win.

Eric rode Honeydrop vigorously, and at every stride he gained on the leader.

Mr. Brockton fancied he had the race, but even so he was not to be caught napping.

In a few moments the magpie jacket drew level with Lambkin, and there was a shout of "The favourite's beat! Honeydrop wins."

Eric heard it, and his blood tingled. He had never felt the excitement of a close finish before. It was a new sensation to him, and he revelled in it.

He had never handled a horse so well, and he knew he was riding well, and that he could just get up in time.

Mr. Brockton rode his finish and timed it with the coolness of an old hand. It would have been the same had he been within an ace of winning the Grand National.

Eric made a last effort, and as the horses passed the box he knew he had just squeezed home.

"You've done me," said Mr. Brockton, as they pulled up. "You rode a capital race, and that's a real good horse."



Praise from such a source, and at such a moment, was gratifying to Eric, and he appreciated it.

There was much cheering when the winner came in, and Eric felt elated at his success.

He looked pale, and the excitement had told on him. His hands trembled as he loosened the girths, and he walked slowly to the scale.

When the weight was all right he felt relieved, and his momentary feeling of weakness passed away.

"I never felt anything like it before," he said to his wife when they were back again at Beechwood; and he related all the incidents of the struggle.

"The excitement was tremendous. I can hardly describe it, Nora; but I felt so desperate at the finish I fancy I must have imparted some of my sensations to Honeydrop, for he seemed to fly in the last few strides.

"I don't envy Findon's feelings in the St. Leger when he saw Primrose such a long way ahead of him; but I know how he felt when he caught the leader and wrested the race from him. Hunting is tame to it, Nora. There's more of it, but the finish of a race crowds more sensation into a few seconds than I ever felt before.

"I was almost as excited as yourself," said Nora. "Oh! Eric, my heart gave such a jump when I saw Honeydrop strike that hurdle. I thought you would come down."

"It was a narrow shave," said Eric.

"Shall you ride in any more races?" she asked.

"I should very much like to," replied Eric, looking at her.

"Then I shall say nothing against it," said Nora. "But you will take great care of yourself, will you not, Eric?"

"Yes, Nora. I will not risk anything even to win a race," he said.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THREE SCORE YEARS AND TEN.

IT was Squire Arden's seventieth birthday, but to look at him no one would have thought it.

At seventy years of age Squire Arden looked younger than many men of sixty.

He had taken good care of himself, and used, but not abused, the gifts Providence had given him.

His life had been a useful one, and he had done much good to the people of Arden, who were bent upon celebrating his seventieth birthday in right royal style.

There was a large gathering at Arden Hall.

Inside were assembled many of the best-known men in Notts, and in a large marquee outside were crowded the villagers of Arden and the friends who had been invited.

It was a representative gathering, and showed the honour and respect in which the Squire was held.

What cheering there was when the Squire, with Nora on his arm, entered the huge marquee.

Round after round of hearty cheers were given, and Eric, Nora, and Mrs. Fairfield came in for their share.

Then the vicar and his wife were cheered, and old Ned Cauntton received a round that gladdened his heart.

The marquee was decorated with many-coloured flags and streamers, and over the head of the table was suspended a black-and-white jacket.

Behind the chairman was a stand covered with a white cloth.

When the cheering subsided, the Rev. Henry Burton came forward. He said, on behalf of the villagers and other subscribers, he had been requested to undertake a very pleasing task.

He would keep Squire Arden on the tip-toe of expectation for a few moments while he said how glad he was to wish him many happy returns of the day.

They all knew and loved the Squire. To them there was but one Squire, and Mr. Arden was that man. Not many men of seventy bore their years so lightly as Squire Arden. He went on to describe how the Squire had treated the Arden people, and how his name was synonymous with all that was upright and honourable.

"Some men are narrow-minded," said the vicar, "and would deny us all pleasures and the use of all the bountiful things God has sent for man's enjoy-

ment. The Squire is not one of those men, and I am on the side of the Squire."

At this point there was a terrific outburst of cheering.

"I am your vicar, and I hope I shall always do my duty towards you, but I do not consider it part of my duty to forbid you to have your pleasures and your sports, as your fathers had them before you.

"I am fond of honest, manly sport, and Squire Arden is the personal embodiment of all that is honourable and straightforward in the world of sport.

"I was present to see Cannon Ball win the St. Leger (terrific cheers).

"Many people, no doubt, think I was wrong to go to Doncaster.

"I went because I wanted to give my old friend, Squire Arden, pleasure, and I do not deny that I also went to give myself the pleasure of seeing his horse win the great race.

"I should be a hypocrite if I pretended Cannon Ball's win did not please me. My friends, I was never more pleased in my life, excepting on one occasion, and that was when my dear wife consented to join her life to mine, and help me in my work.

"My wife is the daughter of one of Arden's most respected men, and I am proud to have won her, and proud she is one of yourselves. She will be the better able to minister to you in your joys and sorrows, better able to understand your wants than a stranger.

"For fifty years Squire Arden has ruled at Arden Hall. He has, so far as I am aware, never made an enemy. He is beloved alike by rich and poor. He is happy to-day because his people are happy, and he is happy because the lad who is dear to him as a son has married a true and beautiful woman.

"We are all happy to-day. Our beloved Squire is seventy years of age. He has reached the allotted age of man, but we trust he may be spared many years, and have his health and strength.

"I have now kept him long quite enough in suspense.

"On behalf of the villagers and a large number of other subscribers, I have great pleasure in presenting you, Squire Arden, with a fine picture of Cannon Ball, the winner of the St. Leger."

The vicar drew away the covering, and, standing on a raised platform, was a magnificent oil painting of Cannon Ball, with Findon standing by in the magpie colours, and old Ned Caunton at the horse's head.

Squire Arden was taken by surprise. The secret had been well kept, and he had heard nothing of it.

"Splendid," he said, half to himself. "It is a grand likeness. Just like Cannon Ball."

In a few brief sentences the Squire replied.

He said: Nothing could have given him more pleasure than such a picture. The vicar had eulogised him to such an extent that he commenced to think during the course of his speech they

were going to present him with a painting of himself as the patron saint of Arden.

He had no pretensions to being different or better than other men. He had striven to do his duty according to his lights.

He was proud to think he had selected Henry Burton to be Vicar of Arden.

There was no pharisaical nonsense about their vicar. He did not pray in public and sin in private. He believed the vicar practised what he preached. He had heard clergymen deliver sermons which were not understandable, and which he recommended as a certain cure of insomnia.

He once heard a clergyman in a country village preach for an-hour-and-a-half, and his congregation rebuked that preacher by staying away from church the following Sunday—not a soul being present, with the exception of the clerk and organist.

The Vicar of Arden considered his congregation, and did not overload them with wearisome discourses.

He thanked them for their magnificent present, and it should occupy the post of honour in Arden Hall. He meant to hang it where the old Magpie Jacket had hung for so many years, and when he looked at it he should always be reminded of their great kindness to him.

The Squire's seventieth birthday was a day never to be forgotten in the annals of the Arden folk.

The festivities were kept up until a late hour, and the younger people danced merrily until the small hours of the morning.

Squire Arden rejoiced to see Eric and his wife so happy and contented at Beechwood.

He loved young people, and liked them to be around him.

The Vicar of Arden found in Ruth Cauntton a wife who loved and honoured him—a woman who worked for the good of others, and who upheld the true principles of religion in the people.

The people of Arden were lucky in having such a man as the Rev. Henry Burton in their midst. He knew them and understood them, and Arden was regarded as a model parish.

Robert Norton had prospered in his business. He repaid Squire Arden his money, and insisted upon paying interest.

"I will not accept it," said the Squire "The ten thousand goes to Eric's banking account."

"If you will not accept the interest I will give the vicar five hundred pounds to use as he thinks fit for the benefit of the villagers," said Mr. Norton.

"As you like," replied the Squire; "but I decline to accept it."

Mr. Norton sent the vicar a cheque for five hundred pounds, and he at once made a handsome addition to the church club house and reading-rooms.

Old Ned Cauntton was busy with the Squire's horses, but he missed Ruth sadly.



"You must not give up racing, Squire," he said. "Now Ruth has gone I have nothing to occupy my mind but the horses."

"Very well, Ned," said the Squire. "Cannon Ball and Primrose will run for us next season, and I will pick up three or four more good youngsters for you."

The Squire's success in the St. Leger encouraged him, and the Magpie Jacket was destined to be seen in many a good race.

Of the minor characters in the story, Bob Stubbins continues as head gamekeeper at Arden, and Hiram Jackson lives comfortably with his daughter in one of the cosy Arden cottages.

Mrs. Norton is happier now she has left Beechwood, and is not compelled to try and maintain a position in the county.

Ethel Norton is still unmarried, although it is said she tries hard to bring Sir William Singleton to her feet.

One morning Eric rode up in hot haste to Arden Hall.

"Come in, my lad," said the Squire. "What news? Good news, I hope."

"Yes," said Eric; "the best of news."

"Is it a—a—a——" commenced the Squire.

"Yes; it's a boy, uncle," said Eric; "and such a fine little chap."

"God bless you, my lad," said the Squire; "and the little one too. I hope he'll be as good a man as his father."

"And I hope he will try to be as good as his father's best friend," said Eric.

"And who may that be?"

"Squire Arden they call him," said Eric.

"You rascal," said the Squire. "Now you had better ride over and see the vicar. The news will encourage him. He is living in hopes himself, I believe."

**THE END.**



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# LETTER FROM SIR JOHN LUBBOCK.

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*May 12th, 1895.*

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